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(Hansard)**

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Monday 7 October 2013

Lundi 7 octobre 2013

Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
OF ONTARIO

Monday 7 October 2013

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE
DE L'ONTARIO

Lundi 7 octobre 2013

The House met at 1030.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.

Prayers.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Mr. Norm Miller: I'm pleased to welcome Joan Pajunen, from the riding of Parry Sound–Muskoka, living in Kilworthy to be specific. She's a director at large with the Ontario Pharmacists' Association, and she's here today. I met with her and Marita Tonkin and Andrew Hamilton, who were helping to educate me on how pharmacists can save money for the health system and benefit patients.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I'm delighted to welcome to the Legislature here this morning Barry Smith, Marilyn Dolmage, Bill Hiltz, Joyce Balaz, Thelma Wheatley, Desmond Sricoll, John Penner and Theresa Devine, survivors from Huronia.

Ms. Helena Jaczek: Please welcome, in the east members' gallery, Billy Cheung, who is a former president of the Ontario Pharmacists' Association and a resident of Oak Ridges–Markham.

Mr. Toby Barrett: I also wish to introduce two people from the Ontario Pharmacists' Association: Marita Tonkin, the hospital rep for the Guelph area; and Andrew Hamilton, a Waterloo student rep and also a local farm boy from Norfolk county.

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have the pleasure to introduce the chair of the Ontario Pharmacists' Association, who happens to be from my riding. His name is Carlo Berardi; welcome to Queen's Park. I also wanted to introduce Billy Cheung, Kenny Chan and Sherif Guorgui, who came and visited me. They're all from the Ontario Pharmacists' Association. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I, too, would like to welcome the Ontario pharmacists today: Dennis Darby, CEO; Carlo Berardi, board chair; and a pharmacist from my riding, Jim Semchism. He lives and works in London North Centre.

Mr. Garfield Dunlop: I'd like to introduce—I'm not sure if she's here yet or not—a former staffer here at Queen's Park: Marsha Josephs. She's here with her son Matthew Britton, and they were with the grade 5 class from Beynon Fields Public School.

Hon. Michael Chan: I would like to welcome Kenny Chan, a constituent of mine from Markham–Unionville. He's studying at the University of Toronto.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'd like to introduce Mike Cavanagh today, with the Ontario Pharmacists' Association. Mike practises in Lindsay, but he's a native of Omemee, and donates a lot of his time in many community events. Thank you for coming, Mike.

Mr. Mike Colle: We have some very special guests here today from the riding of Brampton West. On behalf of the MPP from Brampton West, the Honourable Vic Dhillon, I'd like to introduce the grade 10 class from St. Edmund Campion secondary school in Brampton West. Welcome.

Mr. Steve Clark: I have some friends here from Windsor West. I'd like to introduce our local PC candidate there, Henry Lau, as well as Eric Renaud and Josh Cheifetz. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I'd like to introduce one of the pharmacists here today, and that would be Stacy D'Angelo from the Windsor–Tecumseh area.

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I'd like to join my colleagues in welcoming members of the Ontario Pharmacists' Association and, among them, a constituent from my riding of St. Paul's, the vice-chair of the OPA, Deb Saltmarche.

Mr. Monte McNaughton: It's my pleasure to introduce the many employees—some are in the gallery now—who are joining us today from EllisDon. They're going to be up in the public gallery to show their support for keeping a fair and competitive construction industry in Ontario through the passage of Bill 74. As we know, EllisDon is an Ontario company, one that we should be—

Interruption.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. While we always welcome our visitors to Queen's Park, one of the things that we don't do is participate in any way in expression. I thank you for being here, but I also remind all of us that we don't do that in the galleries.

Further introductions?

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I, too, would like to welcome all my colleagues: the Ontario Pharmacists' Association and all the pharmacists who are visiting Queen's Park today. Let's hope that at the end of the day, the government of today will actually recognize the OPA as the voice of pharmacists.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I will take a moment to remind all members that it's introductions and only introductions.

I'm now here to introduce, on behalf of page Erica George: mother, Jennifer Reid-George; father, Edward George; older sister Lauren George; younger sister Vanessa George; grandfather Michael George; and cousin

Julianna George. Welcome to Queen's Park, visiting page Erica.

Finally, we have in the Speaker's gallery a delegation from the Swedish Parliament's friendship association for Canada. They are accompanied by Mr. Lars Henriksson, the Honorary Consul of Sweden in Toronto. Welcome. Thank you for being here, and enjoy your stay.

ORAL QUESTIONS

POWER PLANTS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: My question is for the Premier. After waiting two very long years to find out the true cost of the cancelled Oakville power plant, Ontarians will finally learn tomorrow what the true cost of that cancellation was, from the auditor. These costs, combined with the cancelled Mississauga power plant, are being paid by ratepayers, consumers and ultimately taxpayers. Their hard-earned money went to save Liberal seats in the last election without their consent. And as is convention, we know that you or your officials have either seen the report or one of its drafts from the auditor.

So, Premier, with that in mind, and given that you signed the cabinet document to cancel Oakville, and the fact that you were the Liberal campaign co-chair in the last election, and the fact that you have been Premier now for eight months, why have you refused to tell Ontarians exactly how much those cancelled gas plants have cost individuals across this province, and will you do it—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Well, the member opposite knows, and she has said, that the Auditor General's report will be released tomorrow. I wrote to the Auditor General of the day asking for a report on the cost of the relocation of the gas plant from Oakville. That report will be released tomorrow, and I'm not going to pre-empt the Auditor General's release of that report. I actually can't do that. I will be briefed on the report this afternoon, and I look forward to the release of the report by the Auditor General tomorrow.

1040

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Speaker, back to the Premier: She knows the true cost of her election decisions. Ontarians know that she has the auditor's number. She herself told the media today what she has seen in the estimates was "unacceptably large." Why should she make us wait another 24 hours? She knows it. Surely the Premier will admit that the cancelled gas plants were on the government's books for as many as eight years before they posed an electoral threat to her Liberal Party.

If the Premier won't divulge the details today, tomorrow we will find out what the true cost was to save the Oakville member's seat. When we add that to the Mississauga cancellation bill, we'll have a little more sense of

how little regard she and her predecessor Mr. McGuinty had for those who are footing their electoral bill.

So, Premier, why have you hidden the full cost impact of the cancelled plants from the public for so long, and since you refuse to do it today, after the auditor's report tomorrow will you stand in your place, apologize to the people of Ontario and tell—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I've already apologized to the people of Ontario. I have said repeatedly that there were decisions made on the relocation of the plant that should have been made differently. We should have paid more attention to the community. The Minister of Energy is developing and has put in place new processes going forward.

Let's remember how we got here. The government listened to the advice of experts. We sited two power plants over the objections of local residents, which should not have happened. Over time, it became evident that the concerns of the residents were based in evidence and were legitimate. The government listened to those concerns, cancelled those power plants for relocation elsewhere.

The Conservatives and the NDP both agreed that that's what should have been done. There was a cost associated with that, but estimates of that cost have varied. That is why I have asked the Auditor General to report on the cost. That report will be released tomorrow, as the member fully knows.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: Back to the Premier: If the Premier wants to talk about how we got here, I will tell her. Let's remember how we got here.

You and several of your cabinet colleagues stood in this House and said one thing on the true cost and said another thing to committee about the true cost. Your government obstructed the work of an officer of this assembly, the Information and Privacy Commissioner.

After saying that there were emails and documents that were deleted, and we couldn't have them tabled, you then found them after you were caught. You used public finances to win five seats in the last election, and Ontarians want to know how much that is personally going to cost them on their tax bills and their energy bills.

Now you have been caught. Why do you refuse to come clean in this assembly on what is arguably the largest electoral fraud in the province's history?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Order, please.

Before we continue, I would ask all members—I was hearing some things that I would classify as borderline,

so I'm not going to say anything specific, but I will say that some of the verbiage that was used caught me a little bit off guard. I would normally have said not to use it. So I'm going to caution all members from here on in that I will be sharper and probably quicker in my responses to those kinds of questions—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac):—which does not require anyone to be speaking while I'm trying to explain something.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Well, the baseless allegations notwithstanding, I think that everyone in this House knows that we have provided 160,000 pages of documents in response to requests from the committee. The committee has heard from 62 witnesses—93 hours of testimony. We've responded to 32 motions. We've offered all of the documents, and we have provided an opportunity for all of those questions to be asked and answered.

The reason I asked the Auditor General to make a report on the relocation of the Oakville gas plant is that there were numbers that were varying, and we wanted to have the Auditor General's report to bring some clarity to those numbers. That report will be released tomorrow. In fact, I would be prevented from releasing that information even if I had it, Mr. Speaker. It will be released tomorrow.

PAN AM GAMES

Mr. Rod Jackson: My question is to the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games. At the last minute last week, we received an internal Pan Am audit not from three weeks ago, but from a year ago, and guess what we found? More bad-faith expenses not in compliance with your own policies, including common submissions without receipts and without details. We also found more petty expenses by top-paid executives, including airport snacking, dry cleaning for \$300, Internet for a vacation, a CA membership and "miscellaneous," costing hundreds of dollars.

Minister, when will you actually do something and have these expenses reviewed and repaid where appropriate?

Hon. Michael Chan: The member is right that the audit was done last year, and the audit was completed in 2012, about October or November.

P/PAGS and my ministry engaged the board right after the audit and asked the board to address those recommendations. The board agreed to address all those recommendations. This is why, in May 2013, the policy related to travel, meals and expenses—that policy was strengthened. That's what happened when the audit came out last year.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rod Jackson: Your policy wasn't strengthened, because the same thing is happening, Minister.

Speaker, the minister and the Premier stood together, united in supposed ignorance of the Pan Am expense problem, and told us they only found out three weeks ago last week. You know what? You're both busted here. The audit was dated for October 2012. You both knew about these problems for a year and did nothing and denied knowing. But your deputy minister told us that your secretariat babysits TO2015, so you had to know.

I know there has been some confusion for you. Presumably, you're the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games—it's in your title, right there. Minister, the same expensing violations have been ongoing since last year's audit. You chose to do nothing until three weeks ago, or, frankly, until now.

Hon. Michael Chan: As I said before, the policy was strengthened in May 2013. That addressed the audit that came out in 2012 in October and November.

Speaker, I'd like to bring it to your attention that three or four weeks ago, after those expenses came to my attention, this is what I have done:

- (1) I asked the board to strengthen the policy.
- (2) I asked them to report to me as soon as possible—at the latest, in the next meeting.
- (3) I asked them to put all future expenses online.
- (4) I wanted them, once the policy is strengthened, to post it online.
- (5) I asked them to make sure it won't happen again.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Mr. Rod Jackson: Minister, you knew about this a year ago. These actions should have been taken a year ago, not last week, not the week before—a year ago. Nothing makes you backpedal like the facts, Minister.

We discovered three things in this audit: \$7 million in obscene bonuses rewarding executives 200% of their base salary just for showing up for work; TO2015 executive and secretariat salaries that eclipse the sunshine list; unlimited, unchecked expense accounts where no charge is too small for the taxpayer to pick up.

Instead of owning your portfolio, Minister, and fixing this, you spent the better part of last week denying you were even responsible for it, instead pointing to the board. The thing is, Minister, I agree with you: You aren't the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games. Will you step down today and fix this for once and for all?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Be seated, please. Thank you. Minister.

Hon. Michael Chan: Thank you so much for the question again.

Speaker, I'd like to let you know where we stand at the moment in terms of the accomplishments by the Pan Am 2015 board. All the infrastructure—they are on time, on budget. The earlier they come in here—it's under budget. Speaker, it will be about \$50 million under budget. This is great work.

1050

The ministry does not set salaries for TO2015 employees. They are not an agency of the government. I shared the same concerns over the subject and sought an explanation from the TO2015 board. A third-party human resources firm was retained to provide recommendations and expertise in—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Answer.

Hon. Michael Chan: —the salary and compensation structure.

Speaker, these games have been able to attract—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. People dealing with tough times expect their government to focus on their priorities, like creating jobs and improving health care, but lately, they're wondering about the priorities of this government. Can the Premier explain why, in tough times, she thinks that Pan Am executives deserve bonuses of up to \$780,000?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I want to speak to the issue of the executive compensation. As I have said and as the minister has said many times, we competed with many jurisdictions to get these games, Mr. Speaker, and we competed within a context of a certain level of salary compensation for the executives in the games. That's the reality. We decided, collectively, that we wanted to bring the games to Ontario, and that is what has happened.

I understand the concerns around the expenses. There was an auditor's report. The minister responded and tightened up the expenses. Again, they were tightened up three weeks ago. The minister gave instructions to the board. But we—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Renfrew will come to order.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: We competed for the games. As the minister has said, the federal, provincial and municipal governments established the compensation packages.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, it's pretty funny that the Premier, who thought 91 cents in parking was outrageous, has no problem handing out a bonus of nearly a million dollars.

People learned about these very bonuses just days after hearing that Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment had received a \$500,000 government grant. Can the Premier explain why, in tough times, she thinks a corporation with an estimated worth in the billions and billions needs a government handout?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Let me just talk about jobs, because the leader of the third party—so the Pan Am Games—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Shouting people down is not the best response.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Rural Affairs will come to order.
Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Twenty-six thousand jobs have been created as a result of the Pan Am Games.

The \$500,000 investment in tourism around the NBA all-star week: \$95 million in return can be expected from that investment.

I think we have to ask ourselves, do we want, as a province, to be able compete with the world for sports events? Do we believe in Ontario's ability to attract tourists as a world-class destination? If we do, then we're on the right track.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Speaker, the people who make this province work every day have been waiting for results on their priorities. Instead, they see a Premier who seems to live on a totally different planet. The Premier is defending executive bonuses and handouts to companies worth billions of dollars.

Can the Premier tell us how much, in tough times, the government is going to be spending cancelling the gas plants in Mississauga and Oakville?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Mr. Speaker, here's what I'm defending. I'm defending investment in jobs, creation of jobs in this province. I'm defending investment in young athletes. The venues that are going to be produced for the young athletes in this province will be world-class. We don't have those venues now. We need them. We need them for swimmers and cyclists and runners. I can tell you, finding a decent indoor track, a decent training facility in this province is not easy. We need those venues. So I'm defending those investments.

At the same time, we have a broad strategy across the province to invest in people and in infrastructure and create a business climate. This is just one part of that.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.
New question.

GOVERNMENT'S AGENDA

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My next question is also for the Premier. People in Ontario are watching as the bills go up and their paycheques stay the same, if they are lucky. But they are seeing this government hand out all kinds of money for CEO bonuses that are more than most people earn in a decade, and millions more spent scraping private power deals in Oakville and Mississauga just to help the Liberals in an election campaign.

David from Omemees says he hasn't seen any help making his life more affordable or better. He writes, "Ontarians are consistently being asked to take wage freezes

and cuts but my auto insurance, regulated by the government, is allowed an 11% raise this year and 7% last year.”

What does the Premier have to say to people like David?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What I would say to David in Omeme and people across the province, Mr. Speaker, is that we have a responsibility, collectively, to do everything in our power to invest in people, in infrastructure and in a business climate that will create jobs. That is exactly what we are doing.

I had the opportunity today to present awards at the Premier’s Agri-Food Summit. There is huge innovation happening in agriculture and ag food processing across this province. There’s innovation, there’s investment in technology and there’s an expansion in that sector that we are going to foster, advance and encourage.

I know that the agri-food sector in this province has huge potential. By 2020, we are challenging the agri-food sector to increase by 120,000 jobs—to double their output. We are going to be able to do that because there is so much potential in the agri-food sector.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: To the average Ontarian, this government seems completely out of touch. When they aren’t handing out lavish bonuses and perks to executives, they’re doing whatever they can to save their own political skin, and every time it’s families that are paying the bill.

Linda in Ottawa is dealing with cutbacks in her husband’s health care supports. She says, “My husband is a dialysis patient three times per week. His nurses have been cut ... I am so disgusted with our health care system.”

Can the Premier tell Linda why cancelling private power deals in Oakville to save some Liberal seats was the government’s priority over her husband’s nursing care?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The priorities of government are multi-faceted, and nursing care and support for people who are ill and who need support is a top priority of ours. I think the leader of the third party knows full well that our investments in health care, and particularly our supports for community care and helping people to get the supports they need, are absolutely critical.

But at the same time, it is important for us to make investments to bring tourists to the province, to create infrastructure. I was in Simcoe last week, and in Simcoe we talked about the investments in roads and bridges and water systems in small towns in rural Ontario. Those communities need those investments if they’re going to be able to grow their economic plans.

Government has to be able to do many things at the same time, Mr. Speaker: care for those who are ill and make investments that are going to create jobs. That’s what we’re doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary.

Ms. Andrea Horwath: New Democrats have been pretty clear about what our priorities are, and we’ve been delivering results: creating jobs, strengthening health care, making life more affordable and making Queen’s Park more transparent and more accountable for the people of this province. But people look at the Liberal government, and this is what they see: executives getting bonuses that are literally worth more than 20 times what a single mom would earn in a single year—what about a decent job for the single moms in the province of Ontario?—hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars wasted just to save the political fortunes of the Liberal Party.

What does the Premier have to say to the people who think her policies and priorities are backward?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I have already said many, many times that the decisions made on the relocation of the gas plants were not what they should have been. I’ve apologized for that. The Auditor General will report tomorrow, because I asked the Auditor General to report; we’ll have that report tomorrow.

What I would say to people who are looking for a job is that I completely agree with the leader of the third party that it is important—and, quite frankly, with the Leader of the Opposition—that it is government’s responsibility to do everything in our power to create the environment where business can flourish.

1100

Investments in infrastructure, Mr. Speaker, and the people who will be working as a result of the Pan Am Games because of the building that’s happening and because of that attraction of tourists to the province—all of that is our responsibility; all of that is creating jobs. We will continue to do that work for the very reason that the leader of the third party notes: that there are people in this province who still need work. It’s our responsibility to create the environment for those jobs to be—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Mr. Monte McNaughton: My question this morning is to the Premier. EllisDon is an employee-owned, London, Ontario-based company that was recently named the number two best employer in Canada and one of Canada’s best-managed companies. EllisDon is currently facing intense pressure from foreign competitors. However, my Bill 74 takes a firm stand in support of Ontario workers and Ontario employers.

Premier, shamefully, last week, you flip-flopped and said that my bill is no longer needed and that you would no longer be supporting it. We know that the sheet metal workers plan to appeal the Divisional Court ruling. When the decision is appealed, will you resume your support of my important bill, or will you continue to favour foreign corporations over Ontario workers?

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Rural Affairs will come to order, and he knows why I don't like what he's doing.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I welcome the folks into the gallery today from EllisDon.

I think we've been very clear that we believe that a level playing field is what should be in place, which is why we expressed support for the bill in the first place.

But from my perspective, one of the aspects of a rational process is that if circumstances change, then it is perfectly reasonable that the approach would change. The Divisional Court has made a ruling that quashed the decision of the Labour Relations Board. In other words, the company can continue to operate as it was prior to the Labour Relations Board case. The circumstances changed.

The Ministry of Labour lawyers have advised us that this ruling achieves exactly what the outcome was that was being sought by Bill 74. So our position is that the bill is no longer needed.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Monte McNaughton: Back to the Premier: Last week your government bowed to union pressure and announced you would no longer support my bill, which will ensure fairness and competitiveness in Ontario's construction industry. As you have agreed in the past, Premier, it is unfair to expect EllisDon to live by one set of rules while foreign competitors undercut them, putting at risk thousands of good-paying jobs in the province. Both the Carpenters' Union, representing 20,000 workers, and LIUNA, representing 75,000 workers, have agreed and support my bill. Bill 74 will maintain the status quo for EllisDon and settle this issue once and for all, but your colleague Pat Dillon has asked you to oppose it, and clearly you have listened.

Premier, if you say that Bill 74 is no longer necessary, why is the company in question represented here today by so many employees?

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Labour.

Hon. Yasir Naqvi: I do want to welcome the hard-working women and men from EllisDon who are here in the House. Thank you very much for coming to your Legislature.

Speaker, the facts remain the same on this matter since we spoke last time in this House; I believe it was on Thursday. As everyone knows, the Ontario Divisional Court rendered a decision on Friday, September 27. In that decision, the court quashed the decision that was rendered before by the Ontario Labour Relations Board, which means, in effect, that the status quo in the province of Ontario, which is a subject of Bill 74, remains the same. There is status quo now.

We've been advised by the Ministry of Labour that, in essence, there is no need anymore for Bill 74. However,

there is a period to appeal, and the deadline is October 15 by 4 p.m. We should wait for that timeline.

TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Percy Hatfield: My question is to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure. Good morning, Minister.

As the minister knows, the province no longer requires independent, rigorous testing or inspection with design-build and performance-based contracts. We've seen the results of that with the girder controversy on the Herb Gray Parkway in Windsor, where lawyers are now speculating and saying that the government may be liable should a failure occur in the future.

Minister, how many other infrastructure projects are currently under way with no independent testing being done on behalf of the owner, the government?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Good morning to the honourable member, who is quickly becoming one of my favourite MPPs.

Mr. Speaker, you often ask us to take a race to the top, and I want to commend the honourable member for leading that race to the top.

I want to be fair to the honourable member, so I'm going to review this with the ministry to get the exact details about the testing regime. There is a very rigorous testing regime that goes into place. They are not political decisions made out of the minister's office; they are decisions made by the Ministry of Infrastructure and the Ministry of Transportation, and I will be sure to get him the details on that. I appreciate the question.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Percy Hatfield: The executive director of the Canadian Council of Independent Laboratories says in a news release that the way the government has been doing business in these infrastructure projects is "a big mistake—a serious and potentially dangerous mistake." Without independent verification, there is no assurance that the materials and construction meet standards.

Minister, will you commit today to changing the way the government has been overseeing these major construction projects and insist in the future that independent testing is carried out on behalf of the ministry and the results are submitted directly to the ministry?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: We have right now the safest roads and the safest bridges in North America, which is quite an accomplishment when you think about Ontario's vast geography, its weather and how many of our highways are isolated in the north. Our northern members will tell you how fickle the weather is and how challenging that situation could be.

I have a great deal of confidence in the existing regime, but to answer your question, yes, we are right now, because we've had I think about five years with our alternative financing program—the Ministry of Infrastructure is actually reviewing things like bundling, oversight and project administration, and those recommendations would be coming forward. I will commit to meet with the

member opposite, the member from Windsor–Tecumseh, to review those with him and to ensure that he is satisfied with the level of review. If you feel that more is necessary, I would certainly give it active consideration.

Again, I appreciate his question.

PHARMACISTS

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Ma question est pour l'honorable ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée. Despite the unseasonably warm weather, the annual flu season will soon be upon us. Among the many recommendations that a physician might offer to people to avoid getting the flu, the best one is this: Get a flu shot. This is one of those cost-effective, broad-spectrum recommendations that we can make to essentially all Ontarians. Everyone can benefit from immunization against influenza viruses, and as parliamentarians we should all be working hard in our collective spheres of influence to encourage Ontarians to get immunized.

Speaker, through you to the Minister of Health: Would you please inform this chamber about what the government is doing to expand easy, timely and efficient access to the annual flu shot?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you, Speaker, and good morning.

Thanks to the member for Etobicoke North for this very important question. A year ago, I announced that we'd be expanding access to the flu shot by allowing pharmacists to immunize their patients. Pharmacists are not only key members of the health care team, they are key members of their communities. They are highly accessible to their patients and they bring care closer to home.

Starting last fall, Ontarians could go to a participating pharmacy where specially trained pharmacists gave them their flu shot. It has been a tremendous success. Last year, pharmacists administered a quarter of a million flu shots, and more and more pharmacists are being trained to administer injections. This year, we expect that the number of pharmacies offering the flu shot will more than triple.

I'm pleased to welcome the Ontario Pharmacists' Association to the Legislature today. We've worked closely to expand access to the flu shot for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

1110

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: As a physician parliamentarian, I'm heartened to see my fellow health care practitioners, our Ontario pharmacists, be a greater part of our flu-shot-delivery model. As an example, a number of pharmacies in Etobicoke North have enabled Ontarians to get their flu shot in a convenient and timely manner.

Pharmacists are among the most trusted of all professions. Ontarians can rely on their pharmacists to help them make decisions about health care and navigate the system.

Speaker, could the Minister of Health inform this House about the expanding collaborative approach that the government is taking so that Ontarians can best benefit from the skills, experience and training of Ontario pharmacists?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We are working to expand pharmacists' scope of practice. We're shifting from a model where pharmacists just dispense medication to one in which they draw from their remarkable and extensive skills and knowledge to provide care. This means more people can get excellent coordinated care closer to home. That's fundamental to the reforms we're making in health care.

In 2007, we launched the MedsCheck Program. This lets Ontarians sit down with their pharmacist to ensure they're safely and appropriately using their medications.

Allowing pharmacists to administer the flu shot was another important way in which we've leveraged pharmacists' skills to benefit Ontarians.

We're working with the Ontario Pharmacists' Association to find even more ways to best employ their extensive knowledge.

I want to thank Ontario pharmacists for all of their great work.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My question this morning is for the Premier. Today is the third anniversary of your Oakville seat-saver program. I want to give you one last chance to come clean with Ontarians.

Liberal witness after Liberal witness has tried to snow first the estimates committee and then the justice committee. Here we are more than a year in and we still don't know how much it cost to cancel the Oakville power plant. You and your energy minister continue to insist it's \$40 million when the evidence shows that's the farthest thing from the truth. You've now called that number "unacceptably large," but the cabinet minute you signed got the whole ball rolling.

Premier, will you tell us how much you spent to cancel the Oakville plant and how much our hydro rates are going to go up to pay for it?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, tomorrow afternoon, an officer of this assembly will be announcing her findings in terms of the costing of Oakville. But, you know, we're still waiting on the Progressive Conservative Party to come forward with the costing that they had before they made very similar promises.

The member mentions the justice committee. Let me share with him some quotes.

We have Frank Clegg, chairman for Citizens for Clean Air, who had this to say to the justice committee:

"We met with all the parties and all the candidates and were given commitments by every candidate in the Oakville area that they would support cancelling the plant.

“Well, I know that certainly Ted Chudleigh, who was the candidate MPP from north of Oakville, was very active in his support of cancelling the plant. During that plant battle—I’ll use that word—PCs did not have a confirmed nominee, but we met with two or three potential candidates, and each of them had said they would support that.”

Maybe the honourable member will share the costing that they had for the Oakville plant.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Premier, the bottom line is that an honest, competent government would know the cost to cancel the Oakville plant and would tell the people of Ontario. An honest, competent government wouldn’t wait three years until they’re held at pen-point by the Auditor General to come clean.

It’s three years later and you’re still saying one thing when you know the opposite to be true. You can run but, after tomorrow, you can no longer hide. By signing the cabinet document, you knew what was going to be “unacceptably large.”

Here’s another chance to save a shred of credibility: Premier, when did you know it was more than \$40 million, and how much is your seat-saver program going to cost Ontarians?

Hon. John Milloy: I would suggest that an honest and competent opposition would have had costing before they made the exact same promise.

Here’s what the member from Halton had to say in this House on September 14, 2010: “Oakville residents have called on you to change the location of the proposed Oakville power plant.... I have listened to the people of Oakville, and I agree with them.”

The member from Halton, in a press release, September 14, 2010: “Minister, will you move the Oakville power plant?... I am asking the minister to consider moving this plant.”

What about the mayor of Oakville, Rob Burton? This is what he had to say to the justice committee on March 19: “In Oakville, we certainly ... had those promises and that we could rely on them from all three parties.... So yes, we felt supported by all parties.”

On March 19: “Oakville was very encouraged by the fact that all three parties were so responsive to our concern.”

Mr. Speaker, it was a promise they made and a promise that we kept.

HURONIA REGIONAL CENTRE

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Premier, this question is for you. I’m joined today by survivors of the Huronia Regional Centre, who are sitting in our galleries. Recently, their class action lawsuit was settled by your government. The most important part of the settlement was that they would finally receive an apology for the abuse and horrible neglect related to government action and inaction.

Will the Premier commit today that the official apology will come from her personally and not from a minister?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The court is still determining, as I understand it—and I know that the Attorney General is going to want to comment on that—the nature of an appropriate apology. We need to hear from that process, and I know, as I say, that the Attorney General is going to want to comment on that.

I just want to acknowledge the people who are in the gallery today. I particularly want to acknowledge Marilyn Dolmage. I don’t know if people in this House know Marilyn well. I’ve worked with Marilyn for years, and I think there’s probably not anyone in this province who has done more for people with disabilities, and children with special needs in the school system, to push governments of all stripes to do the right thing by young people and by people with disabilities. I want to acknowledge and honour her, and to thank her for that work over the years.

Applause.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock, please.

Thank you.

Supplementary?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: I’m sure we all thank the Premier for acknowledging Marilyn Dolmage. Quite frankly, what Marilyn would like is for you to commit to give an apology. That’s what Marilyn would like.

Premier, the survivors don’t want to be seen as clients of the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and they also don’t want to be seen just as part of a legal action against the Attorney General. What they do want, what they do require, is to be seen as full citizens of the province of Ontario, which is what they would be if you, Premier, gave them an apology.

I ask again, will the Premier commit today that the official apology will come from her?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The Attorney General.

Hon. John Gerretsen: First of all, they are full citizens of this province. They always have been and always should have been; that’s number one.

Secondly, I don’t think that any government in the past can be proud of the work that happened at Huronia since the late 1870s and 1880s.

As the Premier has already indicated, the matter is before a judge right now. I understand that there will be a hearing on December 3 to fully lay out the entire aspect with respect to the settlement, on an individual basis and on a collective basis. Right now, notices have gone out to about 4,500 individuals who may have a claim with respect to their residence at Huronia.

I might also add—and this may be no comfort to the residents at all—the class action was settled in a very fast manner, less than three years, which is unusual for a class action.

What happened at Huronia is simply unacceptable, and that’s why this government felt it was important for everyone to settle this action as quickly and as soon—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

1120

FIRE SAFETY

Mr. Joe Dickson: A few weeks ago, I attended a half-day training session with our local firefighters, as did my colleague from Pickering–Scarborough East. It's clear that a firefighter's job is not an easy one. The equipment is heavy, and it takes an enormous amount of courage to enter a situation that everyone else is running away from. It's very, very intense.

Fire departments continue to aim to provide the very best response and emergency times and prevention education programs to their residents.

Yesterday marked the first day of Fire Prevention Week. This year, the Ajax and Pickering departments are focusing on kitchen fires.

Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services: Can you please tell us why kitchen fires were chosen as this year's focus for Fire Prevention Week?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I want to thank the member from Ajax–Pickering for this question.

We all know that cooking brings families together, and sharing meals with loved ones is one of life's great joys. But there are also dangers in the kitchen. Kitchen fires are the number one cause of home fires in the province. This year, we aim to give Ontario families some best practices to help them enjoy their time with loved ones and avoid preventable tragedies.

From 2011 to 2012, the number of fire deaths dropped from 86 to 70, the largest year-to-year drop in Ontario's history, but that number is still too high, and there is more we can do.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Joe Dickson: Fire prevention education is important. It ensures that families are safe and take precautions to prevent a fire.

I know that the Office of the Fire Marshal and all the fire departments across the province tell us to have working fire alarms and smoke detectors in our homes and fire emergency plans and anything else that will assist in these emergencies. All of these measures have greatly reduced the number of fire fatalities in this province.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Speaker—all I need is one more piece of paper. My next question to my Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services is, what are the best practices to prevent kitchen fires from occurring?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: To make sure your family can continue to enjoy meals together without the threat of a kitchen fire, we recommend staying in the kitchen, especially if you are frying something or using a high temperature setting on the stove; keeping anything that can catch fire away from the stovetop; turning pot handles inward so no one, especially children, can knock hot oil or food to the floor; and wearing tight-fitting sleeves when cooking. Prevention is the most effective tool for

fighting fires, so please keep all of these best practices in mind when you're in the kitchen.

Happy early Thanksgiving Day for everyone and keep safe.

POWER PLANTS

Mr. John Yakabuski: My question is for the Premier. Premier, we've heard that the auditor will table a report on the Oakville gas plant cancellation tomorrow. It will reveal the costs that have to be paid back by the taxpayer and the ratepayer.

As a quick reminder, the RFP for that project went out in 2004. Bids were considered, and it wasn't until September 2009 that a contract was signed for a 900-megawatt plant. Within 13 months, the decision was made to not build that plant, with the explanation that the power was no longer needed. According to your version of events, power demand remained constant from 2004 to 2009, and then miraculously dropped by two thirds in a little over a year. While you swore that the cancellation would cost at most \$40 million, we know your mistake is going to cost at least \$310 million.

My question is, who got fired for that—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Stop the clock. Be seated, please. Thank you.

Premier?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: It's interesting to hear the opposition finally talking about issues around siting plants. We, in fact, have asked the justice committee to look into it but, instead, the justice committee wants to simply play gotcha politics.

Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to be a witness at the justice committee. Let me tell you about my experience, particularly the first 10 minutes. I am not making this up. In the first 10 minutes the member from North Bay asked me about a document I had never seen, a document I had never signed and a briefing that I never attended. He spent 10 minutes asking me what I might have hypothetically done. It was pathetic.

We have a committee which has been charged with very serious work to look at some of the errors that were made around Mississauga and Oakville, and come up with some recommendations. It's time that committee got to work and gave the government the information that they can use and future governments can use.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Back to the Premier. One thing is perfectly clear: If someone does the Premier's bidding, they will never face any bad consequences for their actions.

Power demand just doesn't magically disappear overnight. The long-term energy plan reviews the long-term energy needs of the province, not the short-term. Whose job is it to oversee Ontario's needs in between long-term

energy plans if local demand can fall by two thirds within a year, and no one even notices?

We know that your government's gross incompetence on this file will cost Ontarians at least \$310 million. Would you give us an update today, in advance of the auditor's report, of what the final cost of you and your party's negligence on this file will be?

Hon. John Milloy: It is amusing to hear the member try to be thoughtful and be analytical about this when he refuses to stand up and explain why his party made the exact same commitments. Why did the Leader of the Opposition go on YouTube and say if he was Premier of this province the gas plant would be "done, done, done"? Why did the member from Halton over and over again call for the cancellation of the plants? Why have we had dozens of witnesses in front of the committee talk about the outstanding support that they received from the Progressive Conservative Party and the New Democratic Party?

It's time that the Progressive Conservative Party started to explain to us their analysis and their costings. It's time that they allowed their candidates to come before the committee, instead of blocking them. It's time they came clean on a promise that they made to the people of Ontario.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Ms. Andrea Horwath: My question is for the Premier. The ponies aren't running like they used to at Sudbury Downs. The shortened season wraps up at the end of the week after only 20 races, leaving horse people in Sudbury and across the north worried about what happens next. They've seen uncertainty and layoffs across the board. When will the Premier offer some good news for a change, and provide long-term support for horse racing in Sudbury?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: The leader of the third party asks a very important question about an issue that I have been working on very hard, with the Minister for Rural Affairs as well.

We know that the Slots at Racetracks Program was unaccountable. It was not sustainable. There was not transparency into that program. That's why the panel has been asked to prepare a five-year strategy so that we can put the horse racing industry on sustainable footing. That is exactly why my predecessor put the panel in place. Elmer Buchanan, John Snobelen and John Wilkinson are working to make sure that the industry can be on that sustainable footing.

That's why we have a new chair at the OLG, so that we can have an integrated gaming strategy that includes the horse racing industry. That is the track that we're on, and we will have a sustainable horse racing industry in the province.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Andrea Horwath: Certainly, I don't have to remind the Premier that it was, in fact, the governing Lib-

erals who destabilized the horse racing industry in the first place in Ontario.

The Premier says she understands the needs of rural Ontario, but her government has nearly put an entire rural industry completely out of the running. Sudbury horse people are barely hanging on after such a short season.

When will the Premier make a real long-term commitment to horse racing in Sudbury and end the endless talk and piecemeal promises?

1130

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I think putting \$180 million in place for a transition period for three years is a pretty concrete indication of where we want to go. There was horse racing across the province at all of the tracks.

The panel's plan will be based on principles of accountability, transparency, a renewed focus on the customer and positive return on investment to the taxpayers of Ontario. That's what the plan will include. So—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That's over the top.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Yes, it is. It is.

Carry on, please.

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: All of the tracks that participated in the transition funding, and will participate, have to put forward a business plan. We'll work with all of the tracks that are able to do that as we go forward.

I have said quite clearly to the panel that I want a five-year strategy so that we can go through those five years, implement the recommendations and then review at the end of the five years. We want this industry to be sustainable.

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Phil McNeely: My question is to the Premier and Minister of Agriculture and Food.

My riding is made up of both urban and rural areas, from the farmers' market at Orléans' Centrum Plaza, a bustling shopping area, to the Deloitte Farm, which has been in the family for over five generations.

We know that farmers feed cities and are an integral part of the \$34-billion agri-food industry, but if Ontario's industry is going to grow, flourish and continue to compete internationally, more needs to be done by both government and industry.

I attended the Premier's annual food summit with agri-food industry leaders this morning. The Premier issued a challenge to them. Could the Premier please inform the House of the challenge she made?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I appreciate the member for Ottawa-Orléans for his question. So many of the ridings in Ontario that are represented by members in this House are both rural and urban and suburban. They're not one or the other, and it really reinforces my perception of the province that we're one Ontario, that we don't

have these mythical divides between rural and urban, that that's not real.

I was so pleased to be able to go to and to host the ninth Premier's Agri-Food Summit, with people from around the province. I believe that Ontario is filled with promise. I believe that the agri-food sector can grow. If we have some clarity of goals—we need to align our efforts, and we need partnership and collaboration—we will be able to grow that \$34-billion industry into at least a leader in the country and in North America.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Phil McNeely: Again, my question is to the Premier and Minister of Agriculture and Food. People in my riding will be excited to hear about the ambitious agenda our government is setting for the agri-food industry. The challenge the Premier issued this morning will provide ample opportunity for the sector to invest in the community, which will lead to jobs and economic growth. This government is committed to investing in people and businesses alike.

Mr. Speaker, through you: Could the Premier please elaborate on the challenge and what it will mean for agricultural business in Ontario?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: What I said to the agri-food industry this morning was that I'm challenging that sector to double its growth rate and create more than 120,000 new jobs by 2020.

We've looked at the existing targets, and we believe that if we can push those targets, then we can create 120,000 new jobs by 2020. The reason that I believe this is possible is, as I travel the province and as I visit individual industries and farms, I hear about those individual capacities to grow. So if we've got thousands of farms across the province, thousands of industries that can grow a little bit, we can aggregate that, and we can create 120,000 new jobs by 2020.

The targets are being discussed today by the people who are participating in the agri-food summit, and we're going to get some feedback from them. I believe that in collaboration with the sector, we can meet those targets.

GOVERNMENT'S RECORD

Mr. Rob Leone: My question is for the Premier. You may not know this, Premier, but we share an anniversary. Two years ago yesterday, on the same day I was elected the MPP for Cambridge, your seat-saver program became a rousing success for the Liberal Party. Unfortunately, your calculated move left all Ontarians cynical, after spending hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayer money to win an election.

Since I've arrived here, the culture has not changed. After sitting in estimates last year, prying to get answers out of the then Minister of Energy, we now sit in the estimates committee, prying to get answers out of the minister responsible for the Pan Am Games.

In fact, under your government, nothing has changed. You stood by the Liberal scandals at eHealth and Ornge, and after a central role in the gas plant scandal and now

the Pan Am scandal, the Wynne government could have more scandals than the McGuinty government.

Premier, what have you done to ensure that next year's estimates committee won't be another dog-and-pony show with yet another minister evading questions on your next scandal?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Government House leader.

Hon. John Milloy: Again, Mr. Speaker, I go back to my comments about the justice committee. In fairness, the justice committee was asked to look at the matter that emanated from the prima facie finding of privilege, but it was also asked to look at very important matters about the siting of gas plants in the province of Ontario. Many of the Liberal witnesses who have been called have been experts in the field—to give good advice to the committee so that they can write a report which will benefit our government and future governments.

As has been said in this Legislature, we got 17 right and we made two mistakes, but the opposition—all they are doing is engaging in gotcha politics.

As I say, they brought me in front of the committee. I'm still not sure why. They asked ridiculous questions about documents that I had not seen and meetings that I had not attended, which they even admitted I had not seen or not attended.

If we could ask the legislative committees to do their work, it would benefit all of us in this Legislature.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Rob Leone: Premier, how is it that you haven't actually sat down and talked to your House leader about accountability in your government, to get on the same page? Your main spokesman for your scandal-plagued government can't duck responsibility at every turn, all while you pretend to be open and accountable for all. This good-cop/bad-cop routine is a little worn out at this point.

Accountability is demonstrated through action, not conversation. So when the price tag on your seat-saver scandal is revealed tomorrow in a report that you refuse to read, you're going to have to make some wholesale changes on that side of the aisle. Can we count on the Premier to show us what real accountability looks like tomorrow rather than just going through the motions while the cameras are on?

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, we are going to see real accountability tomorrow because it was this Premier who asked for the Auditor General to undertake that report. It was this Premier who suggested a select committee to look into this matter, but the opposition refused because they wanted to go on a witch hunt on a respected member of this Legislature who has since retired from politics.

If the honourable member wants to talk about anniversaries, it was Saturday, October 5 when his leader went on YouTube and said that if he was elected leader of this province, the Mississauga plant would be "done, done, done."

You want to talk about accountability. Mr. Speaker, they have a lot of answers—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. I've asked that that stop and it's going to. New question?

CHILD CARE CENTRES

Miss Monique Taylor: My question is to the Minister of Education. Today, there are new reports that more Ontario children have been exposed to health and safety hazards at unlicensed home daycares, including rodent infestations and unsanitary conditions at daycares in Oakville and Burlington. Apparently, the Ministry of Education was alerted to these risks by city officials, but it took no action—no visits, no inspections, no fines.

Children from Ottawa, Vaughan and Toronto have already died at unlicensed home daycares. Why is the Liberal government continuing to allow the health of children at unlicensed home daycares to be at risk?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm pleased to respond to the question. Speaker, I think we need to make it clear that since January of this year, when the Ministry of Education has received a complaint, it has followed up on that complaint—when there is a complaint about daycare. In fact, what sometimes happens is that there is some confusion around whether it's a public health complaint, in which case we would refer the complaint back to public health, because, in fact, the Ministry of Education has no authority to deal with public health complaints.

Where it is an education complaint, we have responded to every single one of those and, with one exception, it has nothing to do with this. But it is true that we need to refine the protocols between the two—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. Supplementary?

Miss Monique Taylor: The government has known about the lack of safety at unlicensed home daycares for years, yet today parents still can't get information about past complaints at these daycares. The Ministry of Education doesn't track results of public health reports on unlicensed home daycares or complaints to children's aid, animal control or fire and police services. The ministry doesn't inspect unlicensed daycares, and it does nothing to enforce health and safety violations.

When will the government stop reviewing the situation and start taking action so that parents who drop their children at home-based daycares each day know their kids are safe?

Hon. Liz Sandals: Speaker, it seems to me that if there is a complaint that falls under the authority of children's aid, parents would want an experienced children's aid caseworker looking into that. It seems to me that where there is a health and safety complaint, you would want to have a public health inspector looking into a health and safety complaint. Absolutely, we need to refine the protocols. In fact, in many cases, my ministry would be unaware of those complaints because, in fact, they don't come to the Ministry of Education. Where there is a ministry complaint, we are now following up on those scrupulously.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services on a point of order.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to inform the House today that during a ceremony held last Friday, His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, elevated Ontario Provincial Police Commissioner Chris Lewis to the rank of commander within the Order of Merit of the Police Forces.

The primary focus of the Order of Merit is on exceptional merit, contributions to policing and community development—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): As important as that is as an announcement, it's not a point of order at this particular moment. I would ask the minister to just make her point or else I'm going to ask her to make this as a ministerial statement.

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I will. I wanted to say that the commissioner of the OPP is the first Canadian police leader to have been elevated through all three levels of the Order—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

Mr. Michael Harris: Point of order, Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Kitchener–Conestoga on a point of order.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd just like to wish my seat-mate, the member from Prince Edward–Hastings, a happy 43rd birthday today.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That, too, was not a point of order, but it was a lot shorter.

Mr. Steve Clark: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: We'd all like to congratulate Commissioner Lewis. Why don't you make it a member's statement—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): That, too, is not a point of order.

Let's just stop. I'm going to ask that a briefing be provided to all House leaders on the process of points of order with regard to these kinds of things. We need to make sure that we're—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Hang on. I'm trying to make a point here without the interruptions. This is important. It's part of the decorum of this place, as well, and it doesn't require us to heckle when somebody is trying to make a point that should be somewhere else. So let's calm down.

There are no further debates. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m.

The House recessed from 1144 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DONALD LOW

AGRI-FOOD INDUSTRY

Mr. Ernie Hardeman: I'm pleased to recognize Ontario Agriculture Week and the contributions of our farmers. But if the Local Food Act isn't changed, this will be the last one. Ontario Agriculture Week is a celebration of the many things that we grow in Ontario, but it is more than that. It's a celebration of agriculture's contribution to our economy and the many jobs it creates. It's a time to recognize that our farmers are stewards of the land and work to protect our environment. It's a time to recognize the farmers who are always willing to help those in need.

They demonstrated that last winter, as some farmers struggled to feed their livestock following a devastating drought. Farmers came together and raised money to help those in need and bring in hay from the west. We have seen it through the contributions of Ontario Pork, the Holland Marsh Growers' Association and the many others who give generously to our food banks.

Ontario Agriculture Week is a time to recognize what all our farmers mean to Ontario. Today, more than ever, Ontarians are aware of local food and want to choose Ontario. Now is the time for us to ensure that they can. It's a time to look at what we can do to make local abattoirs sustainable. It's a time for this government to address the challenges our farmers are facing and to show respect for rural Ontario. It's a time for us to make the changes necessary to the Local Food Act that will actually have an impact on our food system so that we can continue to celebrate Ontario Agriculture Week.

JOHN GREYSON
AND TAREK LOUBANI

Mr. Rosario Marchese: Along with many others, I was relieved yesterday to hear about the release of John Greyson and Dr. Tarek Loubani. John is one of Canada's most celebrated filmmakers. He also lives in my riding and has made enormous contributions to Trinity-Spadina. So when I learned, seven weeks ago, that he and Tarek had been arrested in Egypt, I was horrified. It seems they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. No evidence was ever presented against them, and they were never charged with any crime. For seven weeks, they were held in brutal conditions. They must have felt so isolated and alone, but their families, friends and neighbours never gave up fighting for their release.

The campaign to free John and Tarek was visible everywhere. They showed that Canadians would not forget about John and Tarek and will not stop campaigning until they are safely back home.

John and Tarek are out of prison, but they have not been allowed to leave Egypt. The Canadian government says the delay is just a matter of filling out paperwork. I hope this is true. It's time to welcome John Greyson and Tarek Loubani home.

Mr. Mike Colle: I rise today to remember and pay tribute to Dr. Donald Low, the face of Ontario's response to the 2003 SARS outbreak, who passed away on September 18 at the age of 68 from a brain tumour.

Dr. Low was a native of Winnipeg who served as the chief biologist at Mount Sinai Hospital. He wrote books and articles for scientific journals and was a mentor. He worked on infectious diseases and was an early champion of the need to combat antibiotic resistance.

But most Ontarians remember Dr. Low's heroic calm during the SARS outbreak in 2003. As you know, Mr. Speaker, over 44 people died during the outbreak and more than 27,000 people were quarantined around the GTA. Dr. Low worked heroic long hours over many weeks and appeared frequently in newspapers and on TV to reassure the population of Ontario. He had the ability to explain very complex medical terms in a very sincere and understandable way.

During this crisis, we owed Dr. Low an incredible debt of gratitude. He probably saved thousands of lives, and these are the kinds of heroes we should recognize. Dr. Low is truly an Ontario hero and we want to pass on condolences to Dr. Low's children and his wife, Maureen, for his heroic contribution to this province in this time of need.

MARINE PERMITS

Mr. Steve Clark: I rise to address a growing concern to many marine business and waterfront property owners in my riding. I hope that the Minister of Natural Resources is listening. Ontario's endless list of rules and regulations is a big reason why our province is falling behind. In a riding like Leeds-Grenville with so much waterfront, this red tape grows like nowhere else. You must wade through the stuff forever just to install a dock or build a deck. Heaven help us if you're really trying to grow your business.

But it's not just the red tape. The problem I'm raising today is what happens when a property owner or marine contractor finally jumps through that last hoop, and too often when it comes to the MNR office in Kemptville, what happens is nothing. I truly believe that somewhere in that bunker of an office there's a desk where permanent applications go to die.

One file my office is dealing with on behalf of the Ivy Lea Marina has been stuck on that desk since July. After all that wasted time, the only commitment local MNR staff will make is to sign off on it sometime this month so it can be pushed to yet another desk. That means another lost construction season for that business. It's unacceptable, and as I said, I hope the minister is listening. I'm asking him to pick up the phone and demand his staff do better.

ACTRA CONFERENCE AND
ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH CENTENNIAL

Mr. Paul Miller: Last week, I had the opportunity to join the discussion at ACTRA Toronto's fall conference about the importance of protecting young performers. It was an excellent opportunity to hear from the parents of child actors about the need for increased regulations and support. I also had the chance to speak about Bill 71, the Protecting Child Performers Act, and where it currently stands in the legislative process. The response I received was overwhelming. We discussed work environment, health and safety, and tutoring, among other areas which Bill 71 will help regulate. The parents told me about how important the bill is for protecting the rights of child performers and the need for its immediate passage. I would like to thank ACTRA for inviting me to attend and allowing me to participate in the discussion. I look forward to celebrating with you when Bill 71 becomes law. A special thanks to Equity for their input and continued support.

Finally, St. Nicholas Serbian Orthodox Church in my riding will be celebrating their 100th anniversary this weekend. The church will be hosting a weekend filled with events promoting faith, heritage and community. I ask you that you all join in congratulating St. Nicholas church on reaching such a tremendous milestone. I look forward to attending their centennial celebrations this weekend.

SIEMENS CANADA

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It is a pleasure to rise in the House today to tell you some great news about the grand opening of the Siemens head office in Oakville that I was able to attend on September 19. I'm so proud that Oakville's highly educated and skilled workforce, along with strong market conditions, have made Oakville such an attractive location for leading companies such as Siemens to invest in.

As you know, Speaker, Siemens celebrated their 100th anniversary in August 2012 by announcing the opening of this new head office. Having a company with such an immense pool of knowledge and innovation on sustainable towns and cities can only help Oakville, and Ontario, continue to be a world-class place.

As a government, we've worked hard to strengthen the fundamentals of our economy: a competitive tax system, strategic and record investments in infrastructure, one of the best-educated and -trained workforces in the entire world and a deep and passionate commitment to innovation. Siemens' investments in new Ontario-based production facilities focus on the smart grid and clean energy. They're going to create new opportunities for us to be able to work together and to help build that next-generation economy that we all strive for.

On behalf of all the members of my community in Oakville, I'm really proud to welcome Siemens, such a world-class company, to the neighbourhood.

LIONS CLUBS

Mr. John Yakabuski: I was honoured on Saturday evening to join members of the Killaloe and Area Lions Club, as well as visiting Lions members from all throughout eastern Ontario to celebrate the 65th anniversary of their Charter Night with the members and dignitaries from the area.

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The village of Killaloe and the surrounding area—the footprints and fingerprints of the Lions Club are all over that area. If there's a worthwhile project of some note, then the Lions Club has had some involvement in it over the past 65 years. Each and every one of our communities throughout this great province can attest to the work of Lions or other service clubs and how they have made their communities better places to live. I want to thank the members of the Killaloe and area Lions Club for the continued commitment they have made to their communities and the people who live in them.

Also, I want to commemorate the vision of their predecessors, who, 65 years ago, felt that a Lions Club would be beneficial to the people of Killaloe. How right they were. The Renfrew Lions Club sponsored Killaloe, and the charter was granted on June 12, 1948.

I want to congratulate everyone involved, thank the communities for their support and hope that the Killaloe and area Lions Club will be doing its great work for decades to come to benefit the people in the Killaloe area and, by extension, all the citizens of Ontario.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Ms. Dipika Damerla: Pope John Paul II will be made a saint on April 27, 2014, the first Sunday after Easter, a feast day established by John Paul himself. He is credited with curing a Costa Rican woman with a severe brain injury and healing a French nun of Parkinson's disease.

Blessed John Paul, the first non-Italian pope for more than 400 years, is one of the 20th century's most influential leaders. He led the Catholic Church from 1978 to 2005. As a fierce critic of communism, he is credited with helping inspire opposition to communist rule in Eastern Europe, including in his native country, Poland.

He was the spiritual inspiration guiding the peaceful revolution of the Polish people, and his pious leadership led to the collapse of communism. The founder of Solidarity credited the pope with giving Poles the courage to rise up and stand for their rights.

No other pope of the modern era has had a greater spiritual and political impact. He won the hearts of millions, and his lasting message to the world is one of courage and faith.

Wouldn't it be nice if my private member's bill, which aims to proclaim April 2 of each year Pope John Paul II Day in Ontario, could be done in time for him to become a saint?

TEACHERS

Mr. Rob Leone: I'm pleased to rise, on behalf of the Ontario PC Party, to give praise to our province's teachers. With October 5 being recognized as World Teachers' Day, I want to take a moment to thank all Ontario teachers for guiding, inspiring and nurturing the natural curiosity of the next generation. It is perhaps fitting that World Teachers' Day fell on a Saturday, as a day off is well deserved for the all the care, hard work and effort our province's teachers put in.

Certainly, if we all reflect on our years in school, it won't take long before we are fondly thinking about a teacher who left an invaluable impression on us. They may have been a little hard on us, moulded us, challenged us to improve on what we thought was our best, or demonstrated compassion, understanding and support when we needed it most. More often than not, it was a little bit of each.

As education critic for the Ontario PC Party and as a father, I'm proud of the work our teachers do each and every day. It is vitally important that we, as a province, find a way to ensure that our best and brightest teachers are in the front of our classrooms, where they belong.

Today, please think about a teacher who made your life better, and if you can, send them a thank-you.

CORRECTION OF RECORD

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements, and I want to correct the record. I made a mistake this morning, and I want to correct that. I indicated to the member for Leeds–Grenville that he did not have a point of order. He did have a point of order. I apologize to the member. I have dealt with the issue, and I believe I have the Clerk's understanding that she will be speaking to the House leaders on that particular issue.

CHRIS LEWIS

Mr. Steve Clark: Point of order.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): A point of order from the member for Leeds–Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate your ruling.

I believe that Commissioner Lewis deserves the respect of all members of this House, and I would ask for unanimous consent that sometime this week all three parties have the opportunity of up to five minutes to pay tribute to Commissioner Lewis and recognize his raising to the rank of Commander of the Order of Merit of the Police Services.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for Leeds–Grenville is seeking unanimous consent that, sometime this week—may I preface that by indicating, through the discussion of the House leaders?

Mr. Steve Clark: Correct.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —come to the conclusion that, by the end of this week, up to five min-

utes be allotted to each party to bring tribute to Commander Lewis. Agreed? Agreed.

VISITOR

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Also in the House is a guest from the riding of Brant. I'm cheating a little bit myself. Chief Bryan LaForme, Chief of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation, is here with us today. Thank you, Chief.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

COMPREHENSIVE PAY
FAIRNESS ACT, 2013LOI DE 2013 SUR L'ÉQUITÉ
SALARIALE GLOBALE

Mr. Barrett moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 113, An Act to promote fairness in all compensation paid to employees in the public sector as compared to the private sector and to address Ontario's debt through alternatives to public sector layoffs and government program cuts while reducing the fiscal pressure on the people of Ontario who are having trouble paying their bills/ Projet de loi 113, Loi visant à promouvoir l'équité en ce qui concerne la rémunération versée aux employés du secteur public par rapport à celle des employés du secteur privé et à s'attaquer à la dette de l'Ontario sans recourir à des mises à pied dans le secteur public et à des compressions dans les programmes gouvernementaux tout en allégeant le fardeau financier des Ontariennes et des Ontariens qui peinent à payer leurs factures.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Do you agree? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement?

Mr. Toby Barrett: Thank you, Speaker. It does have a short title: the Comprehensive Pay Fairness Act, 2013.

This is a bill that enacts a new act to establish a division within the Ministry of Finance to be known as the comprehensive pay fairness division. This division is required to collect and publish information relating to the settling of all or part of the compensation paid to public sector employees. The information is to include comparisons between the terms and conditions of employment of public sector employees with those of private sector employees.

For that purpose, the Ministry of Finance is authorized to collect information about the terms and conditions of employment, including compensation, of both public sector employees and private sector employees. When making a decision or awards settling all or part of a collective agreement for public sector employees, an arbitra-

tor or a board of arbitration is required to consider the information that the division publishes.

MOTIONS

ADJOURNMENT DEBATE

Hon. John Milloy: Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding late shows.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader is looking for unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Agreed? Agreed.

Hon. John Milloy: I move that the late show requested by the member from Haldimand–Norfolk directed to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs scheduled for Tuesday, October 8, 2013, be rescheduled to 6 p.m. on Wednesday, October 9, 2013.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The government House leader seeks unanimous consent to delay a late show to Wednesday, October 9 at 6 p.m. regarding the member from Haldimand–Norfolk in his question to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. Agreed? Agreed.

Motion agreed to.

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STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

ABORIGINAL HERITAGE

Hon. David Zimmer: I rise in the Legislature today, on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, to acknowledge that October 7 marks an important moment in Ontario's history. It's the 250th anniversary of the Royal Proclamation of 1763. As you've already introduced him, Speaker, I am pleased to be joined by Chief Bryan LaForme of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, who's standing here, and I'm also joined by Mr. Scott Cavan from the Six Nations, who, coincidentally, is the communications adviser at the Ministry Aboriginal Affairs.

While there are differing views on the royal proclamation, it is certainly considered one of the foundational documents in the relationship between First Nations and the crown and therefore between First Nations and all Ontarians. The proclamation, signed by King George III 250 years ago today, was a turning point in the recognition and protection of aboriginal rights in Canada, rights that are now enshrined in Canada's Constitution.

The king proclaimed that all newcomers could not settle the land until the crown had first acquired the land from the First Nations who occupied the land. The principles that the king set out further developed and formalized the ground rules for treaty-making across what is now Canada. In Ontario, this revitalized process

began the very next year with the Treaty of Niagara and continues to this day.

Treaties formalize a relationship between the crown and First Nations based on the principle of trust and mutual respect. We may not always share the same ideas about treaty implementation, but we are all confident that our government, through respectful and meaningful dialogue, will continue to work with First Nation partners to reach greater clarity.

To this end, I can tell you that my ministry is working with our partners on a number of fronts to encourage dialogue on treaty rights and implementation. On Manitoulin Island today and tomorrow, for instance, we are supporting a land and treaty conference hosted by the United Chiefs and Councils of Mnidoo Mnising. The conference will explore First Nation perspectives on treaty rights and responsibilities as well as the duty to consult, and crown First Nation relations.

Ontario will be participating in the Indigenous Bar Association's conference beginning today and running through Wednesday on the Chippewas of Rama First Nation, which will reflect on and mark the royal proclamation's anniversary.

In July of this year, the Archives of Ontario and the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs brought the original Treaty 9 parchment up to James Bay for the first time since the treaty was negotiated in 1905. That was a part of a community treaty conference hosted by the Mushkegowuk Tribal Council.

Members of this cabinet, including the Premier, have visited the far reaches of the province to foster stronger ties with tribal councils, provincial territorial organizations and First Nations communities, from Akwesasne in the east on the St. Lawrence to Fort Severn at the very northern part of Hudson Bay.

Though treaties were made throughout the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, they continue to be as relevant to the people of Ontario today as they were the day they were signed. Awareness of treaties and their continued importance is not at the level that it should be. Many Ontarians do not realize that they are very likely living in an area covered by a treaty. To raise awareness, my ministry has developed a map of the various treaties across Ontario. It is the first detailed map of the treaties covering Ontario that the province has published since the early 1940s. The Premier has asked that we provide a copy of the map to all Ontario schools this fall.

This government is engaged in present-day treaty-making right now in the 21st century. In the coming months, we expect the Algonquins of Ontario to vote on a draft agreement in principle to settle a claim first made in 1772. If ratified, negotiations and consultations will continue jointly among the Algonquins, Ontario and Canada toward a final agreement.

A final agreement will create a better environment for investment, stronger relationships among communities in eastern Ontario and long-awaited recognition for the Algonquin community. A final agreement will represent

Ontario's first modern-day, constitutionally protected treaty.

Mr. Speaker, as we commemorate the 250th anniversary of the Royal Proclamation of 1763, we recognize the need to continue strengthening the relationship between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people. Working together as one Ontario, we are making progress in many areas.

In the past 10 years, we have settled land claims at almost twice the pace of the previous 20 years. Our new relationship fund is investing in aboriginal communities and organizations to help build capacity, work with government and the private sector to pursue strategic projects, and enter into partnerships that connect and benefit aboriginal and non-aboriginal Ontarians alike. This government has made significant investments in aboriginal education, housing and health programs, to ensure that aboriginal Ontarians have the same opportunities as everyone else in Ontario.

Next year marks the 250th anniversary of the treaty of Niagara, which renewed the Covenant Chain alliance between the crown and First Nations of northeastern North America. As we look forward to working with First Nations to commemorate the treaty of Niagara, I encourage all Ontarians to take a moment today, and in the coming months, to learn more about the Royal Proclamation and the treaties in Ontario.

Ontario as we know it would not exist without treaties or the generosity and continuing contributions of our first peoples. Today, the future prosperity of our province is dependent on the full participation of all Ontarians, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Only in this way can Ontario be the fair and just society it aspires to be. Whether you are First Nation; whether you are Métis; whether you are Inuit; whether you live in a rural, urban or remote part of Ontario; whether your family has been here many generations or you are new to the province, we are one Ontario.

Thank you. Meegwetch.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Statements by ministries? Last call for statements by ministries.

It is now time for responses.

Mr. Norm Miller: It's my pleasure to represent the PC caucus and leader Tim Hudak to mark the 250th anniversary of the Royal Proclamation. I, too, would like to welcome to the Legislature Chief Bryan LaForme, chief of the Mississaugas of the New Credit, and also Scott Cavan, who are here today.

Mr. Speaker, this is truly an historic day. It was on October 7, 250 years ago, that the Royal Proclamation was signed. That was at the end of the Seven Years' War—known, of course, for Wolfe and Montcalm and the French and English—and it really has become the foundation of the crown's relationship with First Nations. It was signed by King George III.

The proclamation recognized and protected aboriginal rights in Canada, which have, since 1982, been enshrined in the Canadian Constitution, and has really become the ground rules for treaty-making across Canada—truly an important document.

Mr. Speaker, there's so much history. This is my second time around as aboriginal affairs critic. I will say, there is no shortage of things to learn, particularly history.

Just a couple of days ago, it was the 200th anniversary of Tecumseh's death, another important anniversary; I note there is an essay that has just recently come out, written by Allan Gregg, with lots of good information about that.

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Coming up in the not-too-distant future, we have Louis Riel Day on November 16 as well, with some more history. In my first time as aboriginal affairs critic—the minister was mentioning that Treaty 9 was taken back up to some of the First Nations. I had the pleasure of flying myself up to Mishkeegogamang for the 100th anniversary of the signing of James Bay Treaty 9.

In the learning process that I consider part of this job, I also spent a day with then-Grand Chief Stan Beardy, and chartered a plane and flew—which is the only way to get there—up to Fort Severn and had meetings with the chief and council there. Then it was on to Webequie, which of course is right in the thick of the Ring of Fire. I spent a day doing that—again, learning.

In mentioning the Ring of Fire, I certainly note that there's lots of work there to make the Ring of Fire a reality. I'm pleased that I'm northern critic and aboriginal affairs critic, because I think that with a development like the Ring of Fire, it should be the aboriginal communities, the First Nations communities, that benefit the most from that development. Certainly on this side of the House, we want to see it progress and see those benefits start to accrue.

Mr. Speaker, I should say I would like to be in the riding today, but of course need to be here at Queen's Park. I say that because there are some important events happening there in Parry Sound–Muskoka today. My federal member has the federal aboriginal caucus chair in Parry Sound, and he's hosting round table discussions with the seven First Nations in Parry Sound–Muskoka, those being Moose Deer Point First Nation, Dokis First Nation, Henvey Inlet First Nation, Magnetawan First Nation, Shawanaga First Nation and Wahta, as well as Wasauksing First Nation. Today, they will also be opening a new nursing station in Moose Deer Point First Nation. As much as I like being here at Queen's Park, I'm kind of missing out on some things that I would like to be able to partake in as well as learn from in my own riding today.

In conclusion, this is a historic day. There's lots to learn, as the minister said, from the Royal Proclamation. I think we can all take some time and read about it and learn more about it. It would be good for all of us.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond. Thank you, and meegwetch.

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is my pleasure to address the House to talk about the 250th anniversary of the Royal Proclamation.

I wish this would be an anniversary, but I say we are a long way from that. We certainly mark the date, but there is very little to celebrate when you look at the status of First Nations. I can speak for my riding and for all of the province.

I would, though, take the opportunity to congratulate my friends at Mattagami First Nation, Atikameksheng Anishnawbek and my friends at Bisco who were here to visit Queen's Park not that long ago for this important anniversary, the 250th anniversary of the signing of the treaty where First Nations were recognized as a nation.

You figure that during those 250 years, we would have learned that negotiations, nation to nation, have to be taken seriously. But unfortunately, 250 years later, we continue to see that First Nations' rights are not being respected; that whenever they try to stand up for their rights, it ends up in court; it ends up with tons of delays.

For anybody down in Toronto or in and around southern Ontario, if you have never been to a fly-in-only First Nations community in northern Ontario, please do so. Once you get there, you won't believe you are in Ontario anymore because the amount of poverty that you will see. The amount of struggles that people living in First Nations have to go through is nothing to be proud of and nothing to be celebrated—kids going to schools in shacks that frankly we wouldn't even use as hunting grounds where I'm from, and I live in the north. You look at the houses they have to live in and the crowded conditions they live in, and then you wonder why we have so many problems. Well, try to live 15 people in a two-bedroom house, and you will find out pretty soon why you have social problems: because you get on each other's nerves like you can't believe. Everybody is a human being, and at the end of the day, you need your own space, and we can't even afford them that.

The First Nations in my riding—particularly Atikameksheng Anishnawbek is a very progressive First Nation. They have a chief, Steve Miller, who is very progressive, who has progressive band members around him who really try to make things better. When you give them the respect to stand their ground as a nation, they flourish and they do very well.

We have a brand new subdivision at Atikameksheng Anishnawbek. You may know Holmes on Homes, Mike Holmes, who has the big TV show. He's building a new subdivision. He has done this in a way that is just fantastic. I remember, when he first came to my community, he brought planters for the kids. All of the little kids had little planters, and the bigger ones were to grow shrubs so that once the houses are all built, the kids are going to be responsible for the landscaping of those new homes. They are doing this in a way that is very much respectful of the way who the people in Atikameksheng Anishnawbek want to live their lives and want everybody to prosper and share in that prosperity.

They are close enough to Sudbury that a lot of their members work at the mines and work everywhere else that people in Sudbury work—in forestry or in retail and everything else.

But they continue to have their powwow. I invite you to come and see their powwow. It's the third weekend of August. If you've never been to one, it will really blow you away. It is a moving experience that is worth seeing first-hand.

It is an anniversary today: 250th anniversary. I wish that we would resolve together to do better. When I look at the United Nations, which comes and looks at the north of Ontario and then shows the world the destitute conditions that the people of the First Nations live in, it saddens me to no end. But at the same time, I think it should bring all of us together to say we can do better. We will do better. We will respect our treaties.

PETITIONS

ONTARIO COLLEGE OF TRADES

Mr. Bill Walker: It's my pleasure to offer a petition on behalf of my constituents.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas Ontario's tradespeople are subject to stifling regulation and are compelled to pay membership fees to the unaccountable College of Trades; and

"Whereas these fees are a tax grab that drives down the wages of skilled tradespeople; and

"Whereas Ontario desperately needs a plan to solve our critical shortage of skilled tradespeople by encouraging our youth to enter the trades and attracting new tradespeople; and

"Whereas the current policies of the McGuinty/Wynne Liberal government only aggravate the looming skilled trades shortage in Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To immediately disband the College of Trades, cease imposing needless membership fees and enact policies to attract young Ontarians into skilled trade careers."

I support this, will affix my signature and send it with the outstanding page Kyle from Huron-Bruce.

CONDOMINIUM LEGISLATION

Mr. Peter Tabuns: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas buying a condominium home is one of the most significant purchases a person can make; and

"Whereas currently the purchasers and owners of condominium homes are not properly protected under the laws of Ontario;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To adopt the Property Owners Protection Act which will:

"Provide condominium owners with a number of protective measures including a low-cost dispute review board as an alternative to court action against developers;

“End developer control of the Taron board that is supposed to protect consumers who have warranty problems;

“Extend warranties to five years; and

“Require good-faith language in the declaration so that the developers’ promises at time of sale are carried through in construction.”

I support this petition, I sign it and I give it to page Megan to table.

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CELLULAR TRANSMISSION EQUIPMENT

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: I’ve got a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas cellular communications towers are proposed to be built in the vicinity of Bronte in Oakville;

“Whereas Industry Canada has ultimate authority to approve the location of cellular communications towers under the federal Radiocommunication Act;

“Whereas the province of Ontario has no jurisdiction in the placement of cell towers;

“Whereas the town of Oakville has very limited jurisdiction in the placement of cellular towers;

“Whereas many area residents and local elected officials have expressed concerns with the proposed location and proximity to residential areas;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the province of Ontario request that the government of Canada grant municipalities the right to have enhanced participation in the placement of cellular communications towers in residential areas; and

“That the province of Ontario request that the government of Canada place a moratorium on the construction of cellular towers within 500 metres of residential homes until the implementation of an improved municipal approval process.”

I agree with this and will sign it, Speaker, and send it to you with page Daniel.

PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICES

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m pleased to present a petition on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the Ministry of Health is planning on eliminating OHIP-funded physiotherapy services currently provided to seniors in retirement homes—and changing the current provider of the service as of August 1st, 2013; and

“Whereas the Minister of Health has announced a total of \$33 million in physiotherapy funding, or \$550 per senior for 60,000 seniors, including those in retirement homes”—

Interjection.

Mr. John O’Toole: The Minister of Health is complaining. She can correct this if she wishes.

“Whereas instead of the 100 to 150 visits per year a senior may receive now from their dedicated on-site OHIP physiotherapy staff, the change would mean a CCAC therapist would provide 5 to 10 visits on-site only to seniors who are bedridden or have an acute injury. All other ambulatory seniors would have to attend other community locations/clinics for physiotherapy and exercise off-site;”—get the taxi—“and

“Whereas this change not only reduces the amount of money available, but also moves funds from the lowest-cost provider (OHIP physiotherapy providers—\$12.20 per treatment) to the highest-cost provider (CCAC—\$120 per treatment); and

“Whereas current OHIP physiotherapy providers, who have been providing seniors with individualized treatments for over 48 years, will be delisted from OHIP by the government; and

“Whereas these services have been proven to help seniors improve in their activities of daily living, mobility, pain and fall risks;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To review and reverse the decision to eliminate OHIP physiotherapy services to seniors in retirement homes, our most vulnerable population and most at risk for falls; and continue with the provision of at least 100 treatments per year with a mechanism to access an additional 50 treatments, if medically necessary, with the current low-cost OHIP physiotherapy providers.”

I’m pleased to sign and support this and present it to Taylor, one of the pages, on their last week here at Queen’s Park.

LONG-TERM CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from all over Ontario, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas there are a growing number of reported cases of abuse, neglect and substandard care for our seniors in long-term-care homes; and

“Whereas people with complaints have limited options, and frequently don’t complain because they fear repercussions, which suggests too many seniors are being left in vulnerable situations without independent oversight; and

“Whereas Ontario is” the only province in Canada “where the Ombudsman does not have independent oversight of long-term-care homes. We need accountability, transparency and consistency in our long-term-care home system;”

They petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario “to expand the Ombudsman’s mandate to include Ontario’s long-term-care homes in order to protect our most vulnerable seniors.”

I fully support this petition, will affix my name to it and ask my good page Kieva to bring it to the Clerk.

TIRE DISPOSAL

Mr. Jim McDonell: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas the Ontario government has approved massive increases to Ontario Tire Stewardship’s eco fees for agricultural tires, increasing some fees from \$15.29 to \$352.80, \$546.84 or \$1,311.24; and

“Whereas Ontario imposes tire eco fees that are dramatically higher than those in other provinces; and

“Whereas other provincial governments either exempt agricultural tires from recycling programs or charge fees only up to \$75; and

“Whereas these new fees will result in increased costs for our farmers and lost sales for our farm equipment dealerships;

“Whereas the PC caucus has proposed a new plan that holds manufacturers and importers of tires responsible for recycling, but gives them the freedom to work with other businesses to find the best way possible to carry out that responsibility;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To suspend the decision to significantly increase Ontario Tire Stewardship’s fees on agricultural and off-the-road tires pending a thorough impact study and implementation of proposals to lower costs.”

I agree with this petition and will be passing it off to James.

AIR-RAIL LINK

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas diesel trains are a health hazard for people who live near them;

“Whereas more toxic fumes will be created by the 400 daily trains than the car trips they are meant to replace;

“Whereas the planned air-rail link does not serve the communities through which it passes and will be priced beyond the reach of most commuters;

“Whereas all major cities in the world with train service between their downtown core and the airport use electric trains;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the province of Ontario stop building the air-rail link for diesel and move to electrify the route immediately;

“That the air-rail link be designed, operated and priced as an affordable transportation option between all points along its route.”

I couldn’t agree more. I’m going to add my name to the thousands and give it to Katherine to be delivered to the table.

MARKDALE HOSPITAL

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Grey Bruce Health Services’ Markdale hospital is the only health care facility between Owen Sound and Orangeville on the Highway 10 corridor;

“Whereas the community of Markdale rallied to raise \$13 million on the promise they would get a new state-of-the-art hospital in Markdale;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announce as soon as possible its intended construction date for the new Markdale hospital and ensure that the care needs of the patients and families of our community are met in a timely manner.”

I support this, will affix my signature and send it with page Pratah.

DIAGNOSTIC SERVICES

M^{me} France Gélinas: “Whereas the Ontario government” has made PET scanning “a publicly insured health service available to cancer and cardiac patients...; and

“Whereas,” since October 2009, “insured PET scans” are “performed in Ottawa, London, Toronto, Hamilton and Thunder Bay; and

“Whereas the city of Greater Sudbury is a hub for health care in northeastern Ontario, with” Health Sciences North, “its regional cancer program and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine;

“We ... petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to make PET scans available through” Health Sciences North, “thereby serving and providing equitable access to the citizens of northeastern Ontario.”

I fully support this petition, Mr. Speaker, will affix my name to it and ask page Erica to bring it to the table.

AIR QUALITY

Mr. Jim McDonell: A petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas Ontario’s Drive Clean program was implemented as a temporary measure to reduce high levels of vehicle emissions and smog; and vehicle emissions have declined significantly from 1998 to 2010; and

“Whereas the overwhelming majority of reductions in vehicle emissions were, in fact, the result of factors other than the Drive Clean program, such as tighter manufacturing standards for emission-control technologies; and

“Whereas from 1999 to 2010 the percentage of vehicles that failed emissions testing under the Drive Clean program steadily declined from 16% to 5%; and

“Whereas the environment minister has ignored advances in technology and introduced a new,

computerized emissions test that is less reliable and prone to error; and

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“That the Minister of the Environment must take immediate steps to begin phasing out the Drive Clean program.

I agree with this and will be passing it on to page Megan.

1350

DOG OWNERSHIP

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas aggressive dogs are found among all breeds and mixed breeds; and

“Whereas breed-specific legislation has been shown to be an expensive and ineffective” and cruel “approach to dog bite prevention; and

“Whereas problem dog owners are best dealt with through education, training and legislation encouraging responsible behaviour;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To repeal the breed-specific sections of the Dog Owners’ Liability Act (2005) and any related acts, and instead implement legislation that encourages responsible ownership of all dog breeds and types.”

On behalf of the thousands of dogs that have been euthanized, I’m going to sign this and give it to Kieva to be delivered to the table.

HORSE RACING INDUSTRY

Mr. Bill Walker: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the horse racing industry employs approximately 60,000 people, creates \$1.5 billion in wages and \$2 billion in recurring expenditures annually; and

“Whereas the partnership that was created between government and the horse breeding and racing industry has been a model arrangement and is heralded throughout North America, with 75% of revenues going to the provincial government to fund important programs like health care and education, 5% to the municipalities and only 20% goes back to the horse business; and

“Whereas the horse business is a significant source of revenue for the farming community and rural municipalities;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Ministry of Finance continue the revenue-sharing partnership with the horse racing industry for the benefit of Ontario’s agricultural and rural economies.”

I support this petition, will affix my signature and send it with page Peyton.

HOME CARE

M^{me} France Gélinas: I have this petition that comes from in and around the Peterborough area, and it reads as follows:

“Whereas many Ontarians need health care services at home and 6,100 people are currently on wait-lists for care;

“Whereas waiting for over 200 days for home care is unacceptable;

“Whereas eliminating the wait-lists won’t require any new funding if the government caps hospital CEO salaries, finds administrative efficiencies in the local health integration networks (LHINs) and community care access centres (CCACs), standardizes procurement policies and streamlines administration costs;”

They “petition the Legislative Assembly as follows:

“That a five-day home care guarantee is established and existing wait-lists eliminated so that Ontarians receive the care they need within a reasonable time frame.”

I fully support this petition. I will affix my name to it and ask Erica to bring it to the Clerk.

FISHING AND HUNTING REGULATIONS

Mr. John O’Toole: I’m reading this on behalf of my constituents in the riding of Durham because a couple of them have gone on the bear hunt this week. It reads as follows:

“Whereas the McGuinty/Wynne government has drastically reduced the number of Ontario hunting and fishing regulation booklets” usually “available to the public; and

“Whereas regulations in printed booklets are the most portable and convenient format for outdoorspersons to consult in the field, while hunting or fishing; and

“Whereas in addition to the Internet being unavailable in remote locations, many Ontarians do not have Internet access, or prefer information in print rather than electronic format; and

“Whereas those who hunt and fish pay substantial amounts each year to purchase outdoor cards, hunting licences and fishing licences and it is reasonable to expect that a booklet explaining the regulations should be provided as a courtesy; and

“Whereas Ontario hunters and anglers need to access the most current regulations to ensure they enjoy hunting and fishing safely and lawfully;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, ask the Ministry of Natural Resources to respect the wishes of Ontario anglers and hunters by providing hunting and fishing regulations in a booklet format to everyone who needs one”—and when they need it.

I’m pleased to sign this and send it to the table with Ravicha.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

WIRELESS SERVICES AGREEMENTS ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 SUR LES CONVENTIONS DE SERVICES SANS FIL

Resuming the debate adjourned on September 19, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 60, An Act to strengthen consumer protection with respect to consumer agreements relating to wireless services accessed from a cellular phone, smart phone or any other similar mobile device / *Projet de loi 60, Loi visant à mieux protéger les consommateurs en ce qui concerne les conventions de consommation portant sur les services sans fil accessibles au moyen d'un téléphone cellulaire, d'un téléphone intelligent ou de tout autre appareil mobile semblable.*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was a little bit confused as to who was speaking, but I see that it is my turn. I appreciate, as always, the opportunity to rise in this House and debate the bills before us.

Today we have, yet again, Bill 60. It's a government bill entitled Wireless Services Agreements Act, 2013. It's a bill that, I guess in the title, is pretty well self-descriptive; it deals with wireless services agreements in the province of Ontario. Who in this province isn't familiar with the complexity of wireless services agreements as we get closer and accept the use of cellphones in our everyday lives, as a constant, almost? I can't imagine that there is a member in this House that doesn't have a cellphone attached to their hip almost 24/7; I certainly do myself. Sometimes it becomes an annoyance, especially when I'm trying to hang out with my family, but it's certainly a part of our lives and it's an integral tool to be able to provide the services that we do as members to our constituencies.

That's just us in this House, to be able to relay information, but how has the cellphone industry and the proliferation of cellphones and the ability to connect wirelessly to the Internet—how has that change affected our province and our economy? Well, certainly it has opened up the doors to knowledge and information.

It was said that, in this day and age, in 2010, given the proliferation of cellphones and the access that people have with their cellphones, we today have more access to information on the spot than Bill Clinton did in his term as the president of the United States. He had to go through a lot of hoops to be able to get to the information that we now have easily on our phones and can access quite easily. Certainly, he knew things that we probably aren't privy to, and he was able to access that, but it's just in terms of sheer access to the Internet and to be able to retrieve that information is now almost universal.

That being said, with that access comes, of course, some need to regulate what we get, what we see and how we pay for it. This is what this bill attempts to do. I will say from the outset that my honourable colleague the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton spoke at length—I believe he did an hour lead on this bill—and talked pretty eloquently about the redundancy of this bill through the provincial Legislature as it relates to what was done and has been done at the federal level.

Previous to the introduction of this bill, some protection, some regulation and governance through the CRTC was given to be able to keep tabs on what the wireless industry was doing and how we protect consumers. That's really, I think, what is at the heart of this bill: consumer protection. That's something that we all look to, and our constituents look to us to ensure that we are regulating and providing some oversight and transparency, especially in telecommunications and wireless.

The first aspect of this bill is that the provider is required to provide—"provider" being the wireless service provider; the ones that we know in this province are the big 3 of Telus, Rogers and Bell, and there are several others—clear written contracts that spell out which services come with the basic fee and which services would result in a higher bill. So, first is to provide clear language.

If you've ever signed a cellphone contract, first of all, you need a microscope. The font on those contracts is quite small; it's difficult for any person of any age to be able to read that fine print, and it is expansive. It deals with all of their regulatory regime. It deals with the rights and responsibilities. It would take you an hour or two hours and to retain a lawyer to be able to understand the complexities of cellphone contracts in this day and age.

I think it's welcome news to be able to provide some clear language in contracts, spelling out which services come with the basic fee—basic airtime, roaming packages, data packages, texting packages—but also enhanced fees that you might not know about. You might not even know that you are signing on to a whole host of other fees that you maybe might not need and maybe might not certainly understand. I look forward to seeing what that will be, and I look forward to actually reading it within my next contract.

I can tell you, Speaker, that over the summer I took a one-day trip to Philadelphia to visit some family. My wife and I flew out of Detroit Metro to Philadelphia. It was an hour-and-a-half-long flight. I think the flight cost us about \$180. I got to Philadelphia, opened up my phone, checked some of my emails and texted my cousin to pick us up at the airport. He drove us to his place in downtown Philly. We went, hung out—

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Big mistake.

1400

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Pardon me?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Big mistake.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Big mistake? A \$900 mistake. Oui, madame, 900 \$ ça m'a coûté, pour juste ouvrir mon cellulaire.

My phone was—the roaming was on. I don't know. I thought, "Hey, I'm just checking my email." I wasn't watching videos or playing games. A text: "Pick me up." "Send me home." For that 24-hour trip it cost me more to turn the cellphone on than it did to fly to Philadelphia with my wife and return to Detroit.

Interjection: Shame.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: Shame. Shame on me, I guess, for turning my cellphone on, but really, I wonder how many other cellphone users have come across this same scenario. Of course, my colleague from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, within his notes which I was reading, talks about some \$2,000 or \$3,000 bills, even one \$20,000 roaming charge. It would be ridiculous to think that someone could incur a \$20,000 fee for using their cellphone. It's beyond comprehension for me, and I think that's again, hopefully, what this bill intends to do.

In the sense that it is redundant, as the CRTC is now able, given the federal legislation that was passed in 2010, if I'm not mistaken—oh, no. I'm sorry. You know what? I am mistaken. The bill comes into effect in December of this year, so that's why I wasn't capped. Unfortunately, they are still able to. But the CRTC now has the ability, given the federal legislation, to cap as of December 2013. I think we all look forward to that level of protection.

What this bill does, at the provincial level, is give some remedy for cellphone users to be able to seek out compensation and to be rewarded compensation that is due through their contracts, meaning that if they've been overcharged, a user could appeal through Small Claims Court and receive up to three times the amount of the charge. In essence, if the refund is \$100, that cellphone user could ultimately get compensated to the tune of about \$300. This makes sense, because if you're going to fight a \$100 cellphone overpayment charge, given that you might have to take a day off to go to Small Claims Court, well, that's a day off of work, potentially. It might cost you more to fight that \$100 charge than it would to simply to let it go and then to switch providers.

Talking about switching providers, that's another component of this bill that I think is also covered at the federal level: the right to exit your contract within a one-year time frame. It's something that I think we've all been accustomed to: being locked into cellphone agreements that are three years in duration. I, personally, have been with my same provider for 10 or 12 years now—one of the reasons, I think, why I was able to successfully lobby my cellphone provider to lower that \$900 charge. So, madame, I was ultimately able to say, "This is a little bit ridiculous. I've never had a \$900 cellphone bill," and they did see my record. But we shouldn't have to go through those hoops anyway in the first place. So they were understanding that this is something that is abnormal, something that really shouldn't happen and something that, if they wanted to retain me as a customer for another 12 years, they had better deal with. I'm thankful that they did and I think I'll continue to be a loyal customer of my cellphone provider. But certainly I think

that for those who don't have the ability or don't have the understanding that they can fight, we need some hard protections and hard caps so that they don't get taken advantage of from the outset.

There are a couple of other components.

The consumer gets the ability to walk away from a contract at any time, with limits on cancellation fees that a service provider could provide, meaning that the limit on a cancellation fee isn't a percentage of your outstanding balance. It would be a cap of \$50, which I think is reasonable. Certainly, to be able to exit a contract that you know is uncompetitive—you see there are better deals out there—and shop around for your service provider is justified. I'll be looking forward to hearing some testimony from folks who are cellphone users who have some thoughts about the \$50 charge.

There's also the right to sue the provider for three times the amount—I had already covered that. Again, I think it's an important step to ensure some consumer protection—it could also act as a deterrent.

What we know, Mr. Speaker, is that the big three cellphone and wireless providers in this country are massive entities. They are multi-million-dollar, if not billion-dollar, corporations, that I'm sure would have nothing but the best legal representation and access to legal representation. And here's little old me, finding out I have a \$900 cellphone bill or, let's say, little old me being overcharged on my cellphone bill and wanting to fight that overcharge, going up against the big cellphone companies.

I see a commercial all the time on TV—I wonder if my colleagues see it every day, as well. It's my good friend, Belle River native Tie Domi, who is doing some promos for a cellphone company. Tie walks up and says, "Stand up to the big guy." Tie certainly is known for standing up to the big guy, being 5 foot 8. But we need somebody like Tie Domi on our side to stand up to the big guy. I think that's what this bill attempts to do.

My colleague—that's certainly not a prop. Is that Tie? There he is. He's a good guy, a great former Toronto Maple Leaf and certainly the pride of Belle River when it comes to hockey.

We do need someone standing on our side. What this bill doesn't do is provide an advocate or an ombudsman. I imagine that people would generally have to seek recourse through the office of consumer protection, but those guys are bombarded with various complaints outside of just cellphone contracts.

In terms of complaints, Mr. Speaker, in 2010 and 2011, the Commissioner for Complaints for Telecommunications Services, the CCTS, received 8,007 complaints, which constituted a 114% increase over previous years. That's a significant increase. Of the complaints received, 62% were with respect to wireless companies and wireless contracts. I guess that ratio is indicative, again, of the proliferation of cellphones in our general, day-to-day activities.

Everyone has a cellphone. In fact, I think we're less reliant on land-based phones even more so. We certainly

don't see the amount of pay phones we used to see on street corners. I rarely use my home phone. I'm rarely home, but we rarely use our home phone as our primary source of communication. It's now strictly cellphones, and that covers the gamut from young people to seniors. My dad is a pretty good cellphone user. After we showed him how to answer it and hang it up, he eventually got the hang of it and now he can't get off the thing.

It's important for us to identify that this is one of the fastest-growing segments. It is an important segment of our economy and communications network. It's important, as my colleague from Bramalea-Gore-Malton says, to give people access to a device that opens up the doors to knowledge. I think this government would be well-served if we looked at ways to do that, instead of redundant legislation that's already covered at the federal level. Nevertheless, here it is before us, and we'll deal with it and criticize it, but also try to point the government in a direction that might be more applicable and more well-serving of the time in this Legislature.

One aspect would be the increased need for high-speed Internet in our rural and northern communities. That's something we are not doing. We still have dial-up Internet in some areas of this province. I think we've all heard the squeaking and screeching and buzzing of a dial-up connection being made at the beginning, the dark ages of the Internet. We'd have to wait two minutes for it to load up and connect, and then we'd get our basic HTML websites loaded up and not much more than that. It would take a couple of minutes to load a page and, by that time, we could make breakfast, lunch and dinner—

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Tea.

1410

Mr. Taras Natyshak: —have tea, go back, and the page would be loaded. Well, we're still in that era in some parts of this province, Mr. Speaker.

I wonder if the government—I know they know that. I know they acknowledge that that exists, but we still don't have a real strategy to ensure that this government is investing in access to high-speed Internet. It's one of the things that prosperous and progressive countries are doing and have done. The Scandinavian countries, I know, have put a heavy emphasis on the infrastructure needed to access high-speed Internet. What has that done? It has connected their country to government services. It has facilitated a democracy. It has also facilitated commerce and, ultimately, made them a more prosperous and progressive society. But it has also affected their level of productivity.

We are in the knowledge era, Mr. Speaker. We all know that, but if we don't have access to knowledge, quick and reliable access, then we're falling further and further behind. It's one thing to ensure that there's some level of protection for users of cellphones and access to wireless services, but it's another thing to actually see that as a vital and strategic resource really for our province, one that I think this government certainly could do more towards advancing.

The act really doesn't ultimately cover one of the biggest complaints that I hear in my office and in my riding of Essex: one of high cost. We are one of the highest-cost jurisdictions for wireless services and cellphone usage on the planet. There are some statistics that show that, on average, for a monthly term the average price that Canadians were paying in 2010, using the same dollar figures for voice, text and data plans, was \$67.50 a month. If we contrast that with countries like Hong Kong and India, where it's \$13.50 and \$12.90 respectively, we are getting gouged. That's something I don't see addressed within the context of Bill 60.

Maybe comparing us to Hong Kong and India is not so much an apples-to-apples comparison. Let's compare us to Denmark, which is a similar type of nation as we are; they're a developed country. Here we are: The Danes, on a similar plan, 250 minutes a month, where we are at \$38.70 in 2010, they pay about 17 bucks. What is it? How is it that they're able to control those prices so effectively? I don't know the specifics of what they're doing, but whatever they are doing, they're doing it right. It has aided in their economy and productivity and, of course, access to knowledge.

One of the things that I would like to see is a specific strategy, a wireless communications, a connectivity strategy, come out of this government. I think one is needed right now because, with every day that comes forward, every day that goes by, we are falling further and further behind, and other countries that have embarked on the high-speed wireless agenda are leaving us in the dust.

That's my time, Mr. Speaker. I truly appreciate the opportunity and look forward to comments from my colleagues.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Liz Sandals: I'm very pleased to be able to respond to the comments from the member from Essex on Bill 60, which is the Wireless Services Agreements Act. This legislation would, if passed, create new rights and consumer protection for cellphone and wireless contract consumers.

I thought it was interesting that the member from Essex was talking about his experience with roaming charges, because I had cause to be in Sault Ste. Marie not too long ago, and somebody said something to me which I wouldn't have thought about, which was, "Be really careful about checking your cellphone and making sure it's not roaming because we're really close to the border here. If it can't pick up your provider's tower, it may just hop over the border and pick up some provider down in the US."

Now, fortunately, when I got home, I didn't have a big \$900 bill like the member from Essex. But this whole issue about roaming and acquiring roaming charges that you have no reason to anticipate and which are quite outrageous is a real problem for lots of consumers. You don't even need to leave the country to get into that problem. That's one of the areas where consumers absolutely need more protection.

But I think maybe the biggest thing is just making it clear to people what does your contract cover, what doesn't it cover and what is the total cost, because you often have all these hidden costs you don't know about with the way contracts are currently structured.

I hope that we will have support from all the members for this bill, and I look forward to hoping that we'll be able to vote on it fairly soon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: It was a pleasure to listen to the member from Essex. He brings a genuine commentary, telling about his own mistakes on roaming, as we all have in our 20 minutes. But I hope he's learned a lesson, because, fooling with government and wasting money like that, I'll start to think you're a Liberal.

On a serious level, I think really a lot is being said about very little. In fact, this is the second go-around. I want to thank Mr. Oraziotti for the work he's done on the bill and commend Ms. MacCharles because she's from Durham and she's a genuine person. It's protecting consumers, and I suspect that we'd all be in favour of that part.

I do think, if you delve down into it, you're going to find that this has been talked about for quite a long time. As I said, it was Bill 5 originally and now we're talking about this. So they've been delaying this for some unknown reason. I think they've been waiting for the federal government to take the steps which they have, and the CRTC code prevails whenever there is a conflict and which we don't need the bill to some extent.

If you look at this, it's really a case that—one thing that I've found in the explanatory notes is that it really does provide due notice, and that's a consumer protection provision in it. Disclosure, clear language, that sort of stuff is pretty straightforward. But the bully tactics they were using—not the government this time; well, they use bully tactics too—about the telephone providers was that they would actually—if you didn't pay the bill and they disconnected your service, you lost the number. Once you lost that number, you couldn't get it back. Many people, whether it's in business or in their personal lives, felt very close to that. As described, many people now throughout the world are using cellphones as the first order of their method of communications.

I think the member touched most of those points, and certainly I think this is about time that this bill went the way of the normal death of some bills or the birth of some bills.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I rise to comment on the remarks made by my colleague the member from Essex. I have to say, the thought that you could get stuck with a \$900 bill for roaming is certainly a sobering reminder of some of the realities we deal with in these contracts. I think it's very useful that there's a requirement for plain language, I think it's useful that there's a cap on the cancellation fees for these contracts and I think it's useful that people

will be able to go after cellphone providers, mobile providers, when they overcharge. But I'm very concerned that it is going to be very difficult, if not impossible, for most people to take on Rogers or Telus or Bell when they have a dispute over their bill.

1420

I think it makes a lot of sense, and I believe it was mentioned by my colleague, that we need a consumer advocate who will work with consumers when they have to appeal a decision of one of these mobile telephone providers. There's no doubt that these mobile providers are making a large amount of money. The bills are quite substantial; we have an ongoing problem in Canada and Ontario with very high cellphone charges. There's no doubt at all, as my colleague said, that these companies will hire very capable legal assistance when it comes to fighting it out with a customer over the content of their bill.

I think it makes sense for us to proceed with this bill and to have committee hearings, but I'm hopeful that my colleague and my other associates will bring forward changes when this matter gets to committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: I'm pleased to rise today to talk about Bill 60, the Wireless Services Agreements Act, 2013. It's important also to know that we brought forward this legislation to protect Ontario consumers because we believe that consumers need, and continue to need, strong enforcement measures and enhanced remedies.

This act will oblige telephone companies to fully disclose their goods and services. They will have to provide and clearly explain which services are included and which would result in added costs. They will also have to have a comprehensive and easy-to-understand agreement, because the problem is often the fine print that you don't understand—you need a lawyer to explain it. Often, you also need a pair of glasses to read the fine print because you don't know what's written there.

It will also require companies to receive a consumer's consent if a fixed-term contract is to be amended, renewed or extended. I'm shocked to hear the member for Essex talking about roaming costs. A \$900 bill is just unbelievable. It should not be accepted in this day and age. I always thought that the CRTC was looking to protect the consumer in Canada, and yes, they announced a new national wireless code on June 3. But this code does not go far enough to protect Ontarians and Canadians. I hope we will speedily vote on this bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments for this round. I return to the member from Essex for his reply.

Mr. Taras Natyshak: I want to thank the Minister of Education and the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services, as well as the member from Durham and my colleague from Toronto–Danforth for their comments.

Evidently, there is some need here. I went through it. Countless other people have gone through it inadvertently. You turn your cellphone on and you turn your cell off, and all of a sudden you've got a \$900 bill. To the member for Durham, I was able to successfully fight that bill. I think I paid what was owed, but not much more than that.

Of course, we hear these calls coming from constituents in our ridings every day. They feel as though here is another big company that's ripping them off, whether it's in insurance or cellphone bills. It's our job to be diligent and provide that protection. I think this takes a step toward that. I hope we have a good amount of submissions from the public to make sure we get it right and to make sure, as well, that we're actually looking proactively at technologies that are coming online. Again, the fact that we now do so much on these cellphones—financial transactions, massive amounts of data that is shared—is indicative of the fact that we are looking at this bill and need to make sure we get it right.

In terms of roaming charges, I live in Windsor, in Essex county, just bordering Detroit, Michigan. We border Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair. We can almost see cellphone towers on the other side of the lake. All of a sudden, you'll get a roaming charge just by being close to the water. I don't know how we'd put a wall up there, but it's certainly something that needs to be addressed. I don't know if we can do that through the context of this bill, but certainly, there are a lot of people who are in the same situation.

Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like to begin by welcoming a group of young female students who are up in the gallery and their adult chaperones. This bill, Bill 60, the Wireless Services Agreements Act, will no doubt have a huge impact on their lives. They are the generation that will be moving this next technology forward. We'd like to welcome them and also apologize that it won't quite be as entertaining as question period in the morning, but we'll do our best.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: You want us to start heckling?

Mr. Bill Walker: You can heckle, yes. That would add some entertainment.

It's a pleasure to speak to Bill 60, An Act to strengthen consumer protection with respect to consumer agreements relating to wireless services accessed from a cellular phone, smart phone or any other similar mobile device, and to represent the interests of my great riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Bill 60, the Wireless Services Agreements Act, has some admirable objectives.

Cap cancellation fees to 10% of the remaining contract, or \$50: This makes sense.

Simplify contract language: We all know that that fine print behind—our colleague from down by Windsor got

caught in one of these things, I think, with that \$900 bill he was referencing.

Disclose hidden fees in contracts, including roaming charges: We're going to hear lots about that. Those are those things that can just scare people out of their shoes, when they turn it on inadvertently, like he advised he did and got a \$900 bill.

Allow the consumer to sue for owed refunds if not repaid swiftly: This is only appropriate. If you've paid more than you should, you should get that money. It's your money, and it should be done in a timely manner.

It lays out a framework for prosecuting wireless companies that break this law.

I'd like to thank my colleagues Jim McDonnell, the former critic, from Stormont-Dundas-South Glengarry; and our current critic, Toby Barrett, from Haldimand-Norfolk, for the great work they've done to bring me up to speed on this bill and to point out some thoughts and concerns that we might have with it.

Speaker, wireless consumers believe mostly that they're paying too much for their mobile services. I think that was referenced in some of the remarks earlier, that other countries have lower rates, and we want just to be treated in the same manner.

Obviously, we want to utilize this very important tool; it truly is a resource for all of us. Every person in my family—my two young sons, Zach and Ben, and my wife, Michaela, and myself—we all have cellphones. It's the modern way to communicate, and we need to do that in as cost-effective a manner as possible.

Those great pages sitting in front of you deserve that as well, because that is their way of life and is going to continue to be. We need to keep that to an affordable measure so that everyone, regardless of whether they're in a remote part of our province, they're in downtown Toronto or they're in the great riding of Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound, has access to this great resource and tool.

I might put in a plug for BlackBerry, which I still believe is one of those visionary companies that brought us to where we are today. We need to do everything we can to retain that great technology that truly is Canadian.

Speaker, my folks at home, my constituents, are telling me they're frustrated with current service agreements that often leave them saddled with harsh fines for roaming and for breaking contracts early. Again, there's legalese by the page that very few people ever really understand, even if they do read it, and the next thing you know, they're hammered with some kind of a fee. They're trying to find a way to keep their costs down, because with this government that's in power now, there's costs all over the place, and revenue tools, I think they're now calling them—I still call them “taxes”—continue to increase. They need to continue to find ways to pay all of their bills, and certainly a mobile phone bill is a necessity in today's world.

They're right to be upset, these constituents and taxpayers. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD, North American consumers pay some of the highest mobile rates in the

world. We need to find a way to address that. We need to ensure that we have competitive rates, as we do with everything—I'll go off on a bit of a tangent here—like our electricity rates.

We used to be the leader in this province. We had the lowest rates, which encouraged companies to set up here in Ontario, to build and to expand here in Ontario. Today, most companies are leaving Ontario because we have the highest rates. In fact, by next year, I believe it's quoted that we'll have a highest energy rates in North America. That's shameful. It's not a good place for our province to be. Like these fees, we need to make sure that we're always competitive, that we're paying fair and decent rates.

Obviously, the big companies have to make money. That's the way the world goes around, and we're okay with that. But they have to be fair rates for the consumer.

The study compared data charges from the top two providers in each of the 30-something OECD countries. While Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden had the lowest prices for mobile users, at about \$130 in fees per year, the highest spending was found in Canada and the United States, at about \$500 for the year. These rates were back in 2009. Today, unfortunately, they're even higher.

I do believe, however, that the federal government is trying to take action on this to bring those rates down and they are having some success, so I am hopeful that they will have even more success in the near future.

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For these reasons, I support the key objectives of this bill. We need that detailed disclosure of goods and services and fees and contracts. It has to be plain, simple and concise language that anybody can understand.

We have a new page in our midst. Good to see you, Mr. Natyshak.

It needs to be plain language. Anybody that's entering into any contract—it used to be a handshake that we premised everything on; now we get into contracts. But in any case, we still need to have those as simple and clear as they are and as they can be.

We need a consumer's consent to amend, renew or extend fixed-term contracts, and thus a prohibition on automatic contract renewals for fixed-term agreements. I think this is what my colleague Mr. O'Toole was referencing, that when you lose that phone number, that's your lifeline. A lot of people spend a lot of money on their business, their business cards and their websites, and they have to change all of that, which has unintended costs that are fairly significant in places. If you lose that by an inadvertent contract detail and the company is not willing to work with you, then that can be an onerous responsibility.

There needs to be a right to cancel agreements at any time and a ban on charges for services that are not accessible where devices are being repaired.

These changes will provide the necessary protection to consumers, which is absolutely a key goal and one that I stand behind very much. It's a huge demographic in On-

tario; 80% of people have a mobile phone, and I would suggest that that is just going to continue to rise, because it really, truly is becoming the mode of communication—I can tell you that in my household, with my two sons, we almost never have a phone conversation. It's a text or an email or a BBM, and that's the way of the world. It's going to continue to go down that way, but we need to ensure that these devices are used as the tools and great communication resources that they are, and we need to make sure we have protections in place for those consumers so that it's a level playing field for all people.

I know that when I travel in northern Ontario, in a lot of cases there is no signal up there. Even in places within my riding, which isn't in the extreme north, but three hours north of here in the city, there are certainly still pockets at times where you can lose that, and that's just not acceptable. A lot of our services, like our ambulances, are utilizing that technology now, the wireless service, so you need to ensure that that is always there. Part of that is working with the industry to ensure that prices are low enough that everybody can have access and the services are there when we need them.

Similar protections are already in place for individuals and small businesses in neighbouring provinces such as Quebec, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and Manitoba, so, again, why is Ontario lagging in this? Minister Oraziotti brought this in, I believe, as Bill 5, and I spoke at that time. I believe most people in the House were in support of it. Now Minister MacCharles has brought it in. I just don't understand why this can't already be in place and we aren't actually engaged in the service protection that it implies we are going to have. We continue to stand here and talk about these things, and at the end of the day, I think we could have had this in place. The federal government has now done their part, and I think that we are sometimes just spinning the wheels just so the Liberals don't have to address the true mess they have made of this province.

More importantly, Canada's telecom regulator has made it easier for consumers to switch to wireless providers—

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Which hospital does he want?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: Markdale.

Mr. Bill Walker: I'd like a Markdale hospital. That's a good point, Minister.

Oh, you're telling me that if I keep saying these bad things, you're not going to give me a Markdale hospital? That's inappropriate, I think. That's not fair to the people of Markdale and area who put \$13 million in the bank for the new hospital.

Interjection.

Mr. Bill Walker: Your members brought up the issue. I'm just wanting to have a good discussion about it. I'm going to fight every day I can to get the Markdale hospital, and I hope all three—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm afraid we're deviating somewhat from the subject of Bill 60. I

would ask the members to refrain from heckling the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, and would return to the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, who has the floor.

Mr. Bill Walker: I apologize, Speaker. I just always want to address with my colleagues, when an important topic like the Markdale hospital comes up, that I can make sure they know that we are still pressing, and my constituents expect them to honour the commitment they made over 10 years ago to build a brand new Markdale hospital.

Having said that, I know the minister is very much on top of this file, and I appreciate her efforts. I am sure she will come through in the very near future with some kind of an announcement that that funding will be forthright.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: As soon as the election is called.

Mr. Bill Walker: As soon as the election? Well, I am hoping that will even come before the election. That would be the honourable thing to do. However, Speaker, I apologize and I will get back to the topic at hand.

Under the new rules governing wireless services, which kick in this December, consumers across Canada will be able to shop around for better deals after their two-year contract expires. In other words, the three-year contract is going to be gone and you will have lots more flexibility to be able to move when you need to. Your world changes, and sometimes your service provider makes changes, so we should have the flexibility to move around as we need to.

Of course, as I've said before, putting a cap on roaming or data charges: There is one in here, I think—well, I'm going to talk about it right now, in fact. There was a BC dad who returned from a family vacation in Mexico to find a \$22,000 bill from his wireless provider—\$22,000. That number is about the same debt a newborn child today is encumbered with by this Liberal government, which has ran our province into the ground with their debt program. So that number really jumps out at me. Speaker, can you imagine—can any of those pages sitting in front of you think of going home at the end of this week, when unfortunately we're going to lose them, and opening up an envelope that says, "You owe me \$22,000," after what's probably been like a vacation being here for five weeks with us? Is that not right, pages? It's been an absolute, great vacation?

Mr. Shafiq Qadri: Amortize it to the next generation.

Mr. Bill Walker: Yes, you have probably amortized it to my grandkids, unfortunately, the way you're running the province at this point. But we don't want to digress into all the challenges you guys have. I don't have that much time. I've only got about 10 minutes left. We can't solve your debt problems in 10 minutes, unless we become the government.

So \$22,000 in roaming charges. That's almost 10 times the cost of the actual trip for something they had no idea was even there. According to the new national wireless code, that should no longer happen. I would

suggest it should no longer happen; it cannot happen in future.

"If a customer cancels a contract before the end of the commitment period, the service provider must not charge the customer any fee or penalty other than the early cancellation fee...."

For fixed-term contracts, "The early cancellation fee must not exceed the value of the device subsidy. The early cancellation fee must be reduced by an equal amount each month, for the lesser of 24 months or the total number of months in the contract term, such that the early cancellation fee is reduced to \$0 by the end of the period."

For indeterminate contracts, "The early cancellation fee must not exceed the value of the device subsidy. The early cancellation fee must be reduced by an equal amount each month, over a maximum of 24 months, such that the early cancellation fee is reduced to \$0 by the end of the period."

As I've said right from the outset of my remarks today, these are all commendable changes and we welcome. After all, wireless rules should be covered by a national plan.

If one of my sons, Zach or Ben, decides at the end of the day that he's going to leave this province and move—with 600,000 people already unemployed, what are the prospects for them to find work in their time getting out of school? Unfortunately, they may have to leave this great province of ours, the leader of Confederation in the past, to go to another province. But if they choose to do that, it would be my expectation that they should be able to take the exact cellphone they have today with the exact plan they have today, and it should be a seamless transition. After all, the electronic world does remove borders.

So it would make sense to me that we should have a national plan, and we would leave it at the national level. In fact, that's going to be done by the end of this year, so it's a bit moot that we're even having this six-hour debate about something that, relatively, we all support and that could have been done the last time, had the government not prorogued Parliament and killed that bill on the order paper.

On that point, Speaker, it's important and worth noting that Ontario residents were promised these changes back in 2011. Unfortunately, the Liberals prorogued and effectively killed Bill 82. Not much needs to be said, Speaker. It could be in law. They keep bringing things back over and over again. Prior to that, it was Bill 5, as I referenced earlier, introduced by Minister Oraziotti, MPP for Sault Ste. Marie.

While this is a good policy for Ontarians, I wonder how soon the government will make it a reality. The next budget is unfortunately not that far away. It's already starting to come at us, and we don't have a lot of time, because who knows what could happen at that point? We'd hate to see this go down yet again and have to bring it back for more duplication and waste.

In truth, we want this government and this Premier to focus on and prepare a jobs plan. Last week marked the 10th anniversary of the Liberal government in Ontario. This weekend, just yesterday, marked my and many of my colleagues—there were 16 new MPPs in the Conservative Party elected last time by the people in their ridings to serve them and their interests and needs. I have to say, it's an absolute pleasure and a privilege to have done that for the last two years. I can't think of a better honour to have, and I hope they're happy with my performance so far.

On my second anniversary, I took some time to reflect on my experience so far here at Queen's Park. As I say, I'm truly privileged and proud to be here. But I am still puzzled by the government's apparent and obvious foot-dragging and dithering on important issues. Why are we spending hours debating a bill we all agree on and that overlaps with what the feds are implementing at the national level?

A few weeks ago, our leader, Tim Hudak, came in and said, "Let's clear the deck of all these bills that you've had waiting. There's a backlog of them." The Premier asked him. She wanted to get on to business and doing other things. We've agreed to that, and yet here we are again today, Speaker, debating a bill that has already been through, from my perspective, the support of the House, could have already been in committee and been passed, had we not prorogued the last time. We need to just pass it and get on to the necessary task of job creation and debt reduction.

We should be in this House talking every day about jobs. There were 550,000 or 600,000 people who woke up this morning without a job and don't see any plan by the governing Liberals to really change that. We should be talking about debt reduction, and yet next year I believe the projection is another \$1.4 billion on to the accumulated deficit, and that's going to be a record \$330 billion at the end of their term. They've virtually run us down the deficit track as far as we can go until we go off the cliff, and we see nothing really stopping that over-spending in anything that we hear from them.

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I've recently been given the privilege to be the critic for children and youth. In the couple of quick briefings and meetings I've had with people from that side of the portfolio, they're telling me about how terrible the services are out there and that there's such a lack out there for people in need. I know the minister is going to jump up and say something here, but at the end of the day, they've had 10 years to fix a lot of the so-called problems that they ended up with. I don't see a lot of action, in many cases.

I'm not being critical of the minister; I know that it's a big job over there, but we need to be doing more than just having conversations and talking and spinning in the media. We need to see true action and we need to start here debating these truly big needs of the province of Ontario and the people we serve.

In my riding, we're talking about school closings. With a \$10-billion deficit and all that money going to interest payments—that could be keeping schools open in rural Ontario like the ones that are facing closure in my riding, which then has a ripple effect of people not staying in the community. They leave, and then there are fewer people paying into the taxation rolls that we all need.

The Green Energy Act, which is going to cost us billions and billions and billions and is forcing people out of this great province: I have seniors and disadvantaged people coming to me and saying, "You know what? I cannot afford my hydro bill anymore. It's bigger than my mortgage. It's bigger than any of my other bills, and I can't afford that." Yet this government still seems intent on steamrolling down that path and adding more to the grid. It makes no sense whatsoever, and yet today we talk about the wireless bill, which could already be enacted and in place.

We talked earlier in question period this morning about another big, colossal nightmare—horse racing. "We're going to fix it with a five-year plan." Well, why did we decimate the industry, only to come back and feel like we're the firemen saving the house? You made the mistake. You've totally decimated that industry. People are leaving, and 30,000 to 60,000 people, again, are going to be out of work because of that decision, and we're talking about a wireless bill that could already be enacted.

I only do this because it was already put in my notes to bring up the Markdale Hospital, because I think it is a very valid point. Again, there are things like the Markdale Hospital—people's health and welfare and well-being—that we could be debating in this House, instead of talking about a wireless bill that again, could already have been enacted and in place.

We need legislation to fix the jobs crisis in Ontario. That's what my constituents in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound are asking for—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I'm going to ask the member to bring his comments back to Bill 60.

Mr. Bill Walker: It will be my pleasure to get back to the wireless bill. Again, I just have to reiterate that we could have had this wireless bill enacted if the Liberal government on the opposite side hadn't prorogued Parliament. If they weren't making such a mess of the province, we probably would have a lot of this stuff in place. We'd have legislation already in place for many of these things.

I don't know how many more times we need to remind the Liberals in power of Ontario's urgent jobs need, because you know what? People won't be able to afford those cellphones if they don't have jobs, so then this becomes a moot point. Why don't we focus on people having jobs? Why do people not have hope in this province anymore? Why are they coming to me, saying, "We've had enough." Enough is enough. We can't live any longer with this. Our kids and grandkids are already going to be indebted for generations to come because of

decisions that this Liberal government has made over the last eight to 10 years.

It's great that the Liberals want to debate a bill that will have a direct impact on a lot of people, because 80% of the population, as I referenced earlier, does use cellphones. But I get back to the very valid point: If people cannot afford their cellphone because their hydro rates are going over the top, if they can't afford it because they don't have a job, then putting in legislation that says "you shall" and "you should" has no real impact, because at the end of the day they are worried about—"Where am I going tomorrow to get a job? How am I going to pay the bills in my house? How am I going to send my kids and grandchildren to school so that they get a good education? How are we going to fund health care?" The most important thing in all of our lives is the health of our family and our friends and our loved ones. But the way this province is going, this bill is not going to change much of that other than give some people a little bit of reprieve. At the end of the day, we need to be getting this through. This should have already been through. We don't need to be debating it much longer in this House. It could have been a done deal. The feds are coming in with new regulations and legislation that will virtually do everything that's being said in here.

My suggestion to the government would be: Why don't you fast-track this one? Get it off the dock like all the other ones that we've agreed to and let's get down to the real important things like health care, jobs and spending cuts that we need, to ensure that we actually aren't spending more money servicing the debt.

I'm not certain that the people at home have really caught on to this. The third-biggest expenditure in this Liberal government is servicing the debt, paying interest that could be going to hospitals, to mentally challenged people, to the homeless. It could be ensuring that every community has jobs and innovation centres so that we actually can become again the province of Confederation that is the engine, not the laggard.

We need to get bills like this through as quickly as we can. We're generally supportive but we want it to get through. That government over there has the ability to pass it tomorrow if they truly wish to; they could have passed it the last time, had they not prorogued. We're getting tired of talking about the same bills over and over and over.

We want to see their jobs plan. We want to see what they're doing tomorrow to make sure those 600,000 people have hope and the ability to get a good-paying job, which helps all of us at the end of the day.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Miss Monique Taylor: It's a great pleasure to stand up and comment towards the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound's presentation here this afternoon. We've heard lots of scenarios happening within his speech today.

I'm quite thrilled to hear that they would be looking forward at fast-tracking this bill. We know how many

bills they've held up on us to move forward. Unlike the Liberals themselves and the government themselves—they could have had this bill completed but did prorogue the government. Fast-tracking—I heard that quite a few times, and it was something that we heard quite often last week when we were pushing through a bill for one company named EllisDon and making sure that that company's needs were being met within this Legislature, which they actually didn't quite need to be. They were being dealt with in a court, but again, that was the fast-tracking that was happening here between the government and the Conservatives at that time.

To bring me back to what's actually being spoken to today regarding the wireless bill, there are some great recommendations in here that I know people in my riding would definitely be looking forward to. Making sure that there's a cap that could be put on cancellation fees is absolutely essential, because we know that being signed in to a three-year contract, with the way that things are changing and the modernization of the cellphone industry and the iPads and everything else that needs this service is just happening at lightning speed—so for someone to be held into a three-year contract is an absolute—it doesn't really work with the time of the day.

So I'm happy to see regulations put on there. I'm happy to see that companies would be asked to pay more when consumers have problems—and that's the end of my time. It goes so quickly here at Queen's Park today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: It's a responsibility, duty and privilege to speak in support of Bill 60, the Wireless Services Agreements Act. I think many of us have shared and experienced various levels of horror stories. In my experience, I don't think we've quite hit \$22,000 or the \$900 for roaming charges, but to avoid those types of unintended consequences, these sort of horrendous charges that some of us might provoke without really realizing it, that's what this wireless services agreement protection act is all about. It's about consumer rights. I think we've itemized a number of the different issues here, whether it's disclosure of the goods and services, consent always, the all-inclusive pricing.

Of course, the due diligence that certainly is demanded by consumers themselves before you sign on the dotted line—and I might just express as well: Do not let anyone, whether it's a member of Parliament or a salesman at the door, pressure you into agreeing to a contract that you don't fully understand.

I need to, as well, just quickly address my honourable colleague from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound who immediately amortized lifelong debts to a newborn. Well, having a newborn in my home, September 19, Muhammad Salman Qaadri, our third child—he will be screened for 32 diseases. He will have hundreds of dollars of vaccinations provided to him, he will have full-day kindergarten, he will have hearing and vision tests, and he will have the highest life expectancy in the western world. That's part of the legacy of the honourable Minister of

Health, the McGuinty-Wynne vision, and of course, he's going to be using cellphones to tell the world about it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Norm Miller: Congratulations to the member on the birth of his child.

I'm pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the speech from the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound on Bill 60, An Act to strengthen consumer protection with respect to consumer agreements relating to wireless services accessed from a cellular phone, smart phone or any other similar mobile device.

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I bring the title in because the member did cover a few other topics as well, as you pointed out, Mr. Speaker. I note he spoke passionately about the Markdale Hospital, with the Minister of Health in attendance, and about how he'd like to see some shovels in the ground there and get that hospital built. I'm sure the minister will be supportive of that.

The bill deals with wireless contracts. Essentially, it brings in more disclosure obligations and more information on cost, a description of services and what effect the specific services would have on costs of particular wireless agreements. I think we've probably all initially, if you've gotten a cellphone or other devices, if you've travelled anywhere—gone to the States, for example—and come back, the first time you did it and came back from a trip and found out you had huge roaming costs you weren't likely aware of. I've certainly had that experience, and so now I'm pretty darn cautious about it if I'm travelling either to the United States or somewhere else. Last year, my wife and I went to visit our daughter over in London and then Ireland for a week. We were quite careful about trying to make sure we bought the necessary coverage for Ireland. In the end we didn't buy as much as we thought we needed, and we still had some pretty significant bills.

It's an area that's changing quickly, it think. All parties are supporting this bill, and we're looking forward to seeing it pass.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: It's my pleasure to speak on this bill and to congratulate the member for Etobicoke North on the birth of a child, and happy anniversary to the two-year gang who are out celebrating.

Earlier, the Minister of Education talked about roaming and border areas. It reminded me about something I guess about eight or nine years ago now. I was still reporting in Windsor and driving down Riverside Drive right across from Detroit. There were two cars in front of me, and one driver was in distress. Another man was on the phone trying to call 911. I was on my way to a story, but I pulled over and tried to help. The problem was, one of the drivers had a heart attack, so the driver that pulled over first tried to call 911 in Windsor. The problem was, the call was received through roaming on a cell tower in downtown Detroit. The 911 operator in

Detroit had no idea how to transfer a call. There was no protocol at all to get that call to first responders in Canada. They went rough 411. They got the Ministry of Health, press one, press two for English or French, for an OHIP card. It took nine minutes or longer for the 911 operator in Detroit to contact first responders in Canada. Unfortunately, it was too late. That said, there is a better protocol in place now. But hearing that and knowing the technology that we're facing today on roaming charges, we still have technology on the borders. We have to do better on the border to make sure that when you place a call, you expect it to be picked up in the country that you're in or where your cellphone is.

I think we can fix little bits, and this bill does that, but there's the entire system that needs fixing, and a lot of that has to do with protection for consumers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member from Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound.

Mr. Bill Walker: Thank you to my colleagues from Hamilton Mountain, Etobicoke North, Parry Sound-Muskoka and Windsor-Tecumseh for your comments, and a special shout-out to my colleague from Etobicoke North and congrats on the birth of your son. I agree with you that your son is walking into the greatest country in the world with the greatest services in the world that we all can have. I would also hope that you will teach him a fundamental principle: to live within your means and not burden his kids and grandkids, like some of you and your colleagues have done in the last eight years. I stand here not as a partisan, but to say it because I truly am concerned about where we've taken this great province and where we continue to take it on the current path we're on. We can't continue to burden our next generation and the generation after that. We need to ensure that we're talking significantly about the challenges we face and putting actions in place to address it today.

We can't continue with the partisan rhetoric and the spin that's in the media every morning, and forgetting about those kids and those grandkids who are actually the ones who are going to suffer as a result of the consequences of the very poor decisions that are often being made, unfortunately, in this House.

Our next generation is the exact reason I'm here. My two boys and, hopefully, their kids, and my nephews and nieces—we need to ensure we're making the right decisions in this House. We need to be talking about the issues, and that's why, yes, I did go away from just the services bill to talk about job creation and debt reduction and the ability to manage our province to the best of our ability, because those are the things that the people in Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound sent me to this House to talk about every day.

Yes, the wireless services bill is a good thing; yes, it's going to help consumer protection; and, yes, it could already be in place. So why are we continuing to debate it and not talking about things like jobs, future prosperity, innovation, health care, education—the things that our

kids definitely need us to be standing here and talking about every day, Speaker?

I will, as my colleagues have talked about, be supporting this bill. I really wish we could get it through and get it off the docket so we can talk about the more important, pressing needs; we have to, if we really care about those folks sitting in front of you and those at home who are going to be our future.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: It's an honour, always, to rise in this House on behalf of the good people of Parkdale-High Park.

I listened with great interest. By the way, if you're tuning in or if we're gaining you back, or if we're just about to lose you, we are talking about Bill 60, which is the wireless bill. It's called the Wireless Services Agreements Act. What it does is it makes some changes to the way that wireless contracts are dispensed, read and dealt with in this province.

Many members have talked about their horror stories. The member from Essex talked about his \$900 roaming fee. I'm sure we've all had roaming fees that have shocked us and surprised us and appalled us. Also, we heard Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound talk about some person who came back to a \$23,000 cellphone bill. Hopefully, with this bill and, of course, its federal counterpart, that sort of ugly surprise will be a thing of the past.

The member from Windsor-Tecumseh talked about a life-and-death situation where, again, this government should answer to the needs of Ontarians, both whether they're in Windsor or the north, where it's hard to get cellphone service.

There was discussion of the old dial-up days, and I wanted to kind of walk people down a little bit of memory lane. I remember very, very well the days before cellphones in this province, where it was a land line or nothing. I am that old. I remember, at that point, early on in my relationship with my husband, the courting relationship, that he was in Ottawa, doing his doctoral degree, and I was living in Huron-Bruce, a new, ordained United Church minister—about a 6.5-hour drive away from each other, so we were long-distance. There was the phone—that's how we communicated—and/or, just towards the end of our courting period, there was email.

I don't know which was worse, because the old land line that we used to have—I mean, we would get bills at the end of the month—we're talking about roaming bills here on cellphones. We would get long-distance bills in those days that would be more than our rent. There would be hundreds of dollars in bills, just from talking to the person you didn't want to get off the phone with over long-distance.

Then, as email came in, there would be that horrible dial-up sound—the member from Essex brought it all back—that nasty dial-up sound, and you knew you could have time to go and make yourself a cup of tea, maybe a sandwich, in the kitchen, and come back, and maybe by

then the email would be loaded. Then it took just as long to get the response.

It was very Victorian, when you think about it, that kind of romance back then.

All that—the way of the dodo. Now it's absolutely essential—and one can't stress that enough. I think a number of speakers have stressed that it's absolutely essential to have a cellphone in this day and age. I mean, just to say that is saying something. You need one; you absolutely need one. It's a necessity.

What this bill attempts to deal with is something that has become an essential service—an essential service—to most Ontarians and make it just a little fairer.

We in the New Democratic Party, among our other answers, are constantly fighting to have Ombudsman oversight over the MUSH sector. We're the only province, still, in all of Canada that doesn't have Ombudsman oversight over hospitals, for example. Well, we need a consumer advocate. We need somebody that you can call when you've got a problem with the kind of abuse that we've seen, for example, in the cellphone industry.

1500

It's not unique to the cellphone industry. Because it's an essential, it just happens to hit home a little harder. You're looking at someone who has a lifetime membership to Vic Tanny's. Anybody remember Vic Tanny's? Well, my life lasted a lot longer than Vic Tanny's, I'll tell you. We've all signed contracts we regret, is the moral of that story.

When you look at cellphone contracts, it's basically an accordion. You sign here, and if you look at the terms and conditions you could just kind of go like this with them. It would take a law degree to really get into them, and that's the problem. The bill purports to amend that, to change that so that the terms of the contract are actually written in real English that people without a law degree can read and should be able to read, and read pretty clearly and quickly.

I know many of us have children who also use cellphones. My daughter got into real trouble with one contract that never should have been allowed. It should be illegal. It should have absolutely been. I couldn't believe it; she was paying \$250 a month for nothing, for a cellphone contract. This is ridiculous. These kinds of fees are absurd. Now the government has come forward with this bill, but it's kind of a little too late.

The federal bill is going to deal with most of this, but the question is, this government has been in business for 10 years. For 10 years, the McGuinty-Wynne Liberals have been the government of this province, so for 10 long years, something as straightforward and simple as consumers being ripped off over and over again on their cellphone contracts and bills—again, a necessity—for 10 years, this government had a chance to do something about it, and did nothing. And here we are, just under the wire as the federal legislators are working on it, to where the bill is largely redundant because it has already been dealt with.

Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent and, of course, we know where they've gone. They've gone into profits. They have gone into some of the most profitable companies that we have. One of them, Rogers, that we deal with here—I have to say, if you have a television system under Rogers, good luck getting service. I mean, if something goes wrong with your television, Rogers is not known for its wonderful service. Let me tell you that, as a consumer of Rogers, and yet they have virtually a monopoly in this part of the world.

These are huge companies. They're huge companies making huge profits, and it takes 10 years to act and bring them into the realm of reason. Whereas last Thursday, one large company, EllisDon—bang! If they want something done, whoosh! A week later, it is passed through this Legislature. But here consumers wait 10 years just to get some relief on some of the most outrageous—in fact, the most outrageous—cellphone bills on the planet, as you've heard many say.

One of the better places for cellphone usage and cellphone bills is the Scandinavian countries. Well, surprise, surprise. Social democratic countries do something right yet again. Isn't it interesting that we look to Scandinavian countries for doing just about everything right? Earlier today in question period, there was a Swedish delegation coming to visit. They were here during question period. One hopes they stay. One hopes the Swedish delegation stays, has sessions with the Wynne cabinet and actually teaches them how to run a country or jurisdiction.

There are nine million people in Sweden. It's smaller than Ontario; we have about 13 million and some. Why can't the Wynne government sit down with the Swedes and learn a thing or two about how to run a jurisdiction where you've got, by the way, free post-secondary education, virtually free childcare, post-secondary students are paid to go to school there, no poverty, housing, a vibrant economy and cheaper cellphone use? Maybe if the Swedes sat down with the Wynne government, they might be able to share some of that expertise on how to run a jurisdiction so that social services could actually be provided to people.

I know there were a couple of ministers over the last sessions here—I won't name names, because I think it's so outrageous; I actually still want them to keep talking to me, but it is in Hansard—who stood up and crowed that we spend less on social services per capita than any other province. I don't think that's something to be proud of. I think that's something to be horribly ashamed of.

We spend less per capita on our students, for example, and post-secondary education than any other province, and our students graduate with more debt than in any other province and pay higher tuition than in any other province. What? That's something to be proud of? That we spend less per capita? Remember that that includes education, health care and all those good things, but yet, when large companies need something done, boy, fast action from this government.

So to get back to the bill, G60, this wireless bill: It's kind of a redundant bill. I gather that about 62% of the complaints that go into the government and consumer services are about contracts and cellphones—62%. So, again, it's surprising that it took 10 years to get some action.

A consumer advocate or an Ombudsman kind of role presumably could get action a little faster than 10 years. It could get something going, something to help people who are being gouged—might we say “ripped off,” because really they are? It might have happened a little faster if we had had the Ombudsman involved here or a consumer advocate, which we have long, long advised.

But, again, you've got an administration here—and I know that the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, of course, went on about the failings of this government. But really, whether it's cellphone use, whether it's post-traumatic stress disorder for our first responders, whether it's poverty, whether it's child care in the province, whether it's payday lending, whether it's the economy, whether it's minimum wage, this is a government that is loath to act and very, very happy to study and consult. Why act when you can actually get a group of people in a room and pay them per diems and give them coffee, hopefully—

Miss Monique Taylor: And a lunch.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: —and a lunch to study? Why act when you can do that? We've had 10 years of doing that. We've had 10 years of doing that on the poverty file and all of these other things I've mentioned.

There was action on minimum wage because a huge campaign was waged. It takes that. It's like pushing an elephant uphill, I've always said, Mr. Speaker, to get something done in this place, and there's been a lot of pushing to get some of these things done.

We really are in a crisis mode here in Ontario. We're in a crisis mode. There was the workers' action study, among others, that said that one out of every two jobs, just about, is precarious employment in this province. That means that in answer to the question, “Will I have a job next year?” the answer was, “I don't know. I don't know whether I'll have a job next year.” Quite frankly, I think the electorate at this point is getting to the point where they say the only people who should be answering, “I don't know if I'll have a job next year,” should be the people who are sitting in the benches of cabinet on the Liberal side, the government side. They should be the ones answering that question with an “I don't know,” because if one out of every two Ontarians is saying that, then surely the priority of this government should be jobs and the economy.

The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound is quite right. Instead, we're debating the wireless cellphone use bill, which, let's face it, is okay. It's okay. I mean, what does it say? “You have a right to sue the big wireless companies.” Well, that's nice. That's sort of like saying citizens' groups have a right to go to the Ontario Municipal Board if a developer does something egregious in their neighbourhood. The problem is that the developer

goes to the OMB with a lawyer, with a planner, with deep pockets, and the citizens—what have they got? They took a day off work. I suspect the right to sue in Small Claims Court—who's going to take the time, really, to go after their cellphone provider for \$100 or \$200? It might cost you more in time off work and fees to go after them for money than it does out of anything you'll get. And if you really go after them, boy oh boy, you're met with a phalanx of lawyers and everything that a multinational could throw at you, and what have you got? You've got a day off work. But you have a right to exit your plans.

These are good things. Don't get me wrong; we're going to support this bill. There has never been any question of that. But the question is, really, for all the legislative time it has taken, for the 10 years it has even taken to get here, based on the number of complaints, I would have thought that's a no-brainer. That should have happened very, very quickly. The consumer advocate—presumably, that should have happened almost immediately.

1510

When we talk about consumer advocates, we had the great good fortune in my riding of having Mike Holmes come and help rebuild our playground that an arsonist had burned down in High Park. Thank goodness he did. Thank goodness for people like him, a really genuine person; one of the few, I must say, who I have met with sort of celebrity status who really are as they seem on television. He really is as he seems on television: a really good guy. He works, I think, out of the best of intentions. He has gone out around the city and around the province fixing shoddy workmanship. Now, for every house that he fixes, there's a horror story. For everything that he helps, there's a horror story: again, contracts. Again, people have signed on with renovators, contractors. Honestly, there is probably a shady contract happening every second of every day in this province.

Without a consumer advocate, without someone to turn to, without someone who's ultimately responsible, other than the minister who sits here, what are people going to do: wait for legislation covering every single aspect of our economy? Because, really, that's how slowly this elephant is being pushed up this hill. Presumably, there's a better way of going about protecting consumers than this.

In terms of protecting consumers, the most egregious example of ripping off consumers, it seems to me, is the payday lending industry, which is again being studied. This is an industry which exists all over Toronto. There's a payday lender on every second corner. You know what the interest is that they charge? Over 500% interest a year, annualized. That's what they're charging, all of them. Do not be fooled with "\$21 for every \$100 you borrow." Yes, you pay \$21. Annualized, do you know what that looks like? Over 500% interest. That's legal? That's insane. And now we have online borrowing. So we've basically legalized usury in this province. That is essentially what has happened. So you talk about ripping

off a consumer? There is no more egregious act than that, yet it exists everywhere.

When I asked the Minister of Consumer Services about it, guess what the answer was, Mr. Speaker. They're studying the issue. They are studying the issue, and the words out of her mouth were almost the mirror of the words out of the mouth of Stan Keyes, who is the head of the payday lending association.

Again, you've got a government that brings in a bill for EllisDon on the Thursday and works with Stan Keyes the rest of the time on payday lending. Talk about the fox in the chicken coop. This is like opening the door of the chicken coop and saying, "Come on in, foxes. It's all yours." Guess who the chickens are? Us. We are the consumers, right?

So this little bill that helps not many—because, again, it's superseded by the federal bill, which makes it somewhat redundant—makes it look, let's face it, like the government is doing something for consumers when, in reality, the province is filled with consumers who have been ripped off by ridiculous contracts, who are going to a payday lender to borrow money at 544% interest. That's the reality of being a consumer in Ontario.

When we need to complain, we get a bureaucracy that listens to our complaint, nods and empathizes, and takes a piece of legislation that takes 10 years to get to the floor before you get relief, and even then you don't, because my friend from Essex with his \$900 roaming fee had to go to bat for himself. A person with a \$23,000 bill had to go to bat for themselves.

We're talking about horror stories here of consumers' realities, and we haven't even talked about the door-to-door energy retailers. That's again another nightmare, preying on seniors, mainly, but on just about everybody who will open the door. So all of a sudden this legislator who has a lifetime membership to Vic Tanny's—hey, I'm just like every other Ontarian. I get ripped off, and there ain't nobody out there looking out for me. Really, there isn't. I, for one, Mr. Speaker, would like to think that I do have a government that looks out for me. I would like to think that there are laws in place to hem in those whose sole purpose is just to rip me off, to steal from me my hard-earned wages. I would like to think that.

So this bill purports to be a little step in that direction. But truly, in the great scheme of things, it hardly counts, and no wonder, because it's very clear that he who pays the piper calls the tune in this province. And even though we are paying the piper, as the electorate, as the people who vote in politicians, somehow our call for a tune doesn't get listened to quite as well, quite as efficiently as, say, an EllisDon or a Rogers or anybody else.

So here we are. Yes, we support the bill. Sure. Why not? It will be redundant by the time it ever gets through committee. Meanwhile, I still have my lifetime membership to Vic Tanny's. I, for one, am happy. I don't have dial-up Internet anymore, and I don't always have to use a land line when talking to my husband long-distance.

But, really, nothing much has changed. If you're in Ontario, it's "buyer beware." If you're in Ontario, it's completely up to you. Do your research. Look out for everything and everyone, because it's truly the Wild East here. The government does little to protect you, and this bill really won't do much either. At the end of the day, you will still be paying the highest cellphone rates in the world in Ontario, despite what this bill does.

With that, I'll sit down and not work out, because, remember, I have that lifetime membership to Vic Tanny's.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Mauro: I'm pleased to have a couple of minutes to respond and speak about Bill 60, the Wireless Services Agreements Act, 2013. I want to congratulate our Minister of Consumer Services, Tracy MacCharles, for bringing this piece of legislation forward.

We on this side of the House, in government, have brought forward a number of bills in the last year or two to deal with consumer protection issues. I don't think we can overstate the importance of this kind of legislation, because at the end of the day, it is very much the kind of thing that people in our ridings—and I know that people in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan—very much pay attention to.

Very recently, as I mentioned—in the last year or two—we have brought forward consumer protection legislation that dealt with gas contracts, electricity contracts and hot water heater rentals. We know—at least it was the experience in my office in Thunder Bay–Atikokan—that it seemed that most of the people who would come into our office for help on those issues were seniors. It seemed like they were the ones who were being most taken advantage of by very aggressive door-to-door sales tactics on those three categories that I mentioned previously. We've brought in legislation to deal with that. Consumer protection is very important.

What's interesting about this one, I think, is that it's a bit distinctive. It's dealing more with cellphone contracts, and I think it's fair to say there are fewer seniors involved with cellphones—although, of course, they are—than certainly almost every person under 25. I don't know what the percentage for usage of cellphones is, but obviously it's very high.

We know that at the root of this is people being charged and overcharged, in our opinion. We hear about this in our constituency offices as well. People are being forced to pay too much money. This legislation, Bill 60, the Wireless Services Agreements Act, 2013, is going to help and protect people. It has become so commonplace, now, that you have a phone. This is going to touch many people in our ridings. I thank the minister for bringing it forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm pleased to rise to comment on the member from Parkdale–High Park.

In Ontario, you have to wonder. I know this bill has been front and centre for many, many years. It's interesting that after the CRTC regulations came out, all of a sudden it becomes front and centre and finally gets pushed over the top by the government. Really, there's very little left in this bill when you take out the new CRTC code.

We want to make sure there is some clarity. We don't want the provincial bill to say something and the federal bill to say something slightly different. We want to make sure we go through this and that we actually make the bill worthwhile and make it so it's clear when we're done.

There's no question that there needed to be some issues addressed, but come June 3 of this year, the code actually covered more than this bill, because a lot of the issues were federal in nature. Roaming charges: There were caps put on them. This bill can't, because it's provincial.

But at the end, we want something that's workable for consumers. We want something that doesn't end up in court challenges based on one statute versus the other. We're looking forward to getting it into committee.

1520

At a subcommittee meeting earlier, just a few minutes ago, we were looking at trying to get stakeholders in so that we can hear some of the issues that we may not have come across just yet. There was a very limited time to debate this. At committee, clause by clause will be just a short two-hour session. We want to make sure that we have the time, that we can work through it and get through the necessary amendments, and try to make this bill relevant for the people of Ontario, to make it so that it's clear, and we end up with legislation that works for the people of Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I appreciate the words and the thought that my colleague from Parkdale–High Park put into her commentary. She touched on a number of areas where in fact there is a crying need for public protection. Clearly, payday loan companies need to be dealt with. People are paying outrageous amounts of interest. That kind of bill needs to be before us.

This bill, as I had said earlier this afternoon, has a few good elements but they're extraordinarily limited. The cap on closing-out fees, some protection on roaming, right to sue—those are not bad things, but they're very limited. As my colleague has said, the ability of most people to go and sue a telephone company, Rogers, Bell or Telus, is extraordinarily limited. Set aside the fact that those companies probably have enough lawyers to fill this chamber, the simple fact that most people don't have the time and ability to pursue a large, well-resourced, well-grounded company for several hundred dollars is a simple reality.

This bill would be far better if there was a consumer advocate in place who could act on behalf of the public dealing with unfair billing practices, dealing with errors that companies refuse to recognize. We, often, in our

dealings with telephone companies, feel incredible futility. They operate on their own, with us as a minor irritant in the background.

My congratulations to the speaker from Parkdale–High Park.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: It's a pleasure to stand up today to speak to Bill 60, the Wireless Services Agreements Act, and I also would like to congratulate the minister for bringing forward an important piece of legislation for consumer protection.

Protecting consumers and ensuring a fair marketplace is part of our government's plan to help people in their everyday lives. We can all agree here that protecting consumers is a good thing. Bill 60 does this through full disclosure of goods and services, including which services are provided, which services would result in added costs, what manufacturer's warranty, if any, on the devices that an individual had and comprehensive easy-to-understand agreements. It would also require consent—now, this is something that the CRTC's work does not include—if a contract is to be amended, renewed or extended. This is a very important piece of consumer protection.

All-inclusive pricing is another aspect of the bill. Service providers would have to include the total cost of any agreement in any price advertisement. Again, this is very important, and something that's not covered by the CRTC. The other things that are important to this bill are a cap on cancellation fees or no fee at all. It would give consumers the right to cancel a wireless services agreement at any time without giving notice to their provider. Cost to cancel would depend on what type of agreement that was.

It protects in terms of unacceptable billing. Consumers could not be charged for the services they could not access because their hardware was being repaired while under warranty. If a customer received a loaner phone while their first one was being repaired, the loaner phone would need to be provided free of charge.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes our time for questions and comments. I am pleased to return to the member for Parkdale–High Park for her response.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Well, as I said—and thanks to all who weighed in on this debate—let the buyer beware; caveat emptor. In Ontario, you're still not safe if you're a consumer. You're still not protected if you're a consumer. Don't expect your government to do much for you if you are a consumer. This bill won't change that. Certainly, with the new CRTC regulations, it will do very little to change that, if at all.

Again, cellphone use is still the most expensive here of most jurisdictions in the world—if you can get cellphone use, which, many speakers have pointed out, is still a problem in some areas of Ontario, as is getting good Internet service. This should not be the case in a developed nation such as ours, in a developed province such as this.

We should take advice from some of those who do it much, much better, i.e. the Swedish delegation who are in this very House this very day. Why doesn't this cabinet, this government, meet with them to learn how to reproduce what they have accomplished in their jurisdiction here in Ontario—about all things, really, but particularly here, where, again, they have much cheaper cellphone use and much more democratically available cellphone and Internet use?

I do remember something that I forgot, Mr. Speaker: Do you remember when the first cellphones came out, and they were like a brick? Remember those? We thought they were so cool. They weighed about five pounds, and you held them, maybe, with one hand against your ear. Those of us who are old enough to know know that it was ever thus, but it does not make it right.

Surely, what we really need in this province is, we need a consumer advocate or Ombudsman oversight. We need someone you can turn to to complain to about your rights.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate.

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I'm very happy to speak to Bill 60, the Wireless Services Agreements Act, 2013. We're looking forward to this bill going to committee and looking forward to making the everyday lives of Ontarians better.

I too want to share a cellphone horror story, similar to the member from Essex. A few years ago, I went to visit family in India, and I took my cellphone along. I knew that I would be paying more—\$200 or \$300, maybe \$400 at the most—but when I got back, my staff were very surprised to learn that I had a \$2,500 phone bill. They thought someone might have used it inappropriately. That wasn't the case. I phoned Rogers; in fact, they were right in accordance to their agreement that I had with them, and I had to pay the bill.

Those are the types of reasons why we are bringing forward this bill. Cellphones, at one time, as the member from Parkdale–High Park stated, were big. They were very expensive. I remember seeing ads in the paper where they were being sold for upwards of \$7,000 to \$8,000, and the pay per use was also very expensive: more than \$2 or \$3 a minute.

Along with the progression of cellphones, there are also problems that have arisen in this industry. That makes it even more important for bills such as this one—not particularly with the pricing problems, but we have also brought about legislation to ban cellphones, because we have seen many catastrophes where people have become injured or even been killed because of the use of cellphones, so problems that we were not aware of before. Again, for the same reason, we are looking forward to this bill going to committee so we can hear from Ontarians about some of the things that we may have missed.

1530

I am from Brampton West. It's a riding which is diverse, with quite a few people from other places who have recently moved to Brampton and to Canada, and they have come into a new system for everything in their lives, especially the new billing system for cellphones. I know, talking to friends and family in other countries, the billing model is a lot different than ours. For example, a lot of countries have pay-as-you-go systems, but we have a system where we get billed at the end of the month for the services that we've used.

Oftentimes, through ethnic media, I hear from different cellphone providers advertising that has some fairly decent rates on the face of it. For example, for \$25 you get a cellphone, unlimited phone calling, but what they don't tell you in the fine print is some of the services you may end up using, such as, for example, if you're travelling, roaming. They don't tell you how much that will cost, and that creates a problem. That's when, a lot of times, phone companies and, moreover, we as MPPs from all sides of the House get calls. Oftentimes we are able to resolve the issues they have; more than often, we cannot because the phone companies are right: They do have those stipulations in their contracts about the costs that people would incur if they used certain different types of services.

That's why in this bill we would be requiring full disclosure of goods and services. Providers would have to clearly explain in easy language what charges would result as a result of different services. As well, with respect to manufacturers' warranties, providers would have to clearly explain what the warranties are and if there are additional warranties the consumer can purchase. As well, phone providers would have to give an explanation of how the cancellation fees would be applied to the agreement. And, as I stated before, they would be required to clearly demonstrate on their contracts how the roaming fees are charged, because roaming is one of the main problems. Roaming charges are one of the main problems that consumers have with cellphones and one of the more frequent calls that the ministry and our offices get with respect to cellphones.

The second main part of this bill deals with comprehensive and easy-to-understand agreements. That would require that the cellphone providers provide easy and clear language so that consumers can understand what they are signing up for. If they do not provide it, the consumers have the right to cancel. Again, with respect to my riding of Brampton West, a lot of new Canadians who may not be sure of what they're signing up for because of the language barriers would need to have explained exactly what services they are signing for and how much they will be paying for those services.

The third broad point of this legislation, Mr. Speaker, is that the companies would require consent from the users of the cellphones to amend, renew or extend the contract. Oftentimes we give our credit card number to the cellphone company, and we may sign for a certain length of time. Once you go beyond that, you keep

getting billed if you're using it. This bill would require that the companies would have to contact you to ask if you plan to continue with the agreement that's in place.

The fourth main component of this bill would give consumers the right to cancel a wireless service agreement at any time by giving notice to the provider. This has been, again, one of the bigger problems in the past, and with this bill we would be addressing that issue.

I know there have been statements made with respect to the CRTC, but the CRTC's recent changes have not addressed all the issues that exist with respect to the use of cellphones. With this bill, Mr. Speaker, we hope that we will be able to tackle most of the problems that consumers face when they are using their cellphones or when they are interacting with the cell companies with respect to their cellphones.

Like I said before, we're looking forward to taking this bill to the committee, with the hope of making the lives of ordinary Ontarians easier.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments? Questions and comments?

Further debate.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill 60. You have to excuse my voice; I'm getting over the cold that seems to be going through the Legislature. If you haven't received the cold yet, when you do, it's horrible. As part of that, I'm glad that we have pharmacists in the building. The Ontario Pharmacists' Association is meeting with various representatives throughout the Legislature. So if you are coming down with a cold, it's the best time to talk to them about the medication that you're on, and perhaps they could prescribe you something to take to help alleviate the cold.

It was really interesting this morning when I met with the pharmacists. They gave the nine policies that they're after, the nine priorities they want this government to look at, so I thought I'd just go over them before I hit my speech here:

(1) Enable community pharmacists to provide more patient care services.

(2) Provide fair and adequate compensation for the valuable health care services pharmacists provide.

(3) Provide fair funding for the work of pharmacy owners in delivering clinical services to Ontario's public drug program patients.

(4) Establish a formal relationship between the Ontario Pharmacists' Association and the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. I think that's a great idea. Point number four is probably key to this whole day—ensuring that there's proper dialogue between the OPA and the Ministry of Health, which seems to have disappeared over the past few years.

(5) Implement a comprehensive plan to reduce the misuse and abuse of prescription narcotics and other controlled substances. That's another great point.

(6) Secure government investment in technology.

(7) Encourage investment by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care in a drug supply monitoring system, in collaboration with the government of Canada.

(8) Ensure that family health teams, community care access centres and other primary-care practice sites have sufficient resources to employ a pharmacist—or if they can't, refer them to community pharmacies.

(9) Enable hospital pharmacists to practise their maximum scope of practice. There's a lot of talent in our pharmacists, especially at the hospital level, that we could expand upon to improve the health care of citizens across this province

I thank you for your indulgence. I gave that little plug in case not all of the MPPs here get a chance to sit and talk with the members of the OPA.

Back to Bill 60, An Act to strengthen consumer protection with respect to consumer agreements relating to wireless services: It's not a shock to anybody that when they open up their phone bill every now and then, they get what they call cell shock, which, of course, is your cell bill with the skyrocketing prices. There's nothing worse than noticing a slew of charges on your cell bill that you didn't realize were coming. From comments from constituents in my office, you'll find that it's not an uncommon occurrence.

Digging into some facts and figures, we've noted that in 2010, wireless services made up 62% of the complaints to the commissioner for complaints for telecommunications. Of those 62% of complaints, 41% were from Ontarians.

Wireless contracts are complicated, and it's very difficult to wade through the complicated legal jargon to know what you're really signing up for. Therefore, I'm pleased to say that we have all-party support for this bill that will help protect consumers when it comes to their mobile devices.

Considering that 80% of Ontarians have a cellphone, this is an issue that affects pretty much everyone, and therefore we must do what we can to make sure we get the law right and make regulations matter.

I'd also like to acknowledge the efforts of our federal regulator, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, in developing a national wireless code of conduct, and I have that right here. We downloaded it from the website. It's quite a document. It's about 10 pages long. I think everybody should give it a good read. It's at www.crtc.gc.ca. Look up the wireless code and take a good look at it. This code helps to provide clarity to both mobile service providers and consumers.

An aspect of that national code that I think is particularly beneficial to consumers involves how the code is to be interpreted. Any ambiguity arising from a mobile contract or how the code is applied to the contract must be interpreted in a manner that is favourable to the consumer. I think that's an excellent point, "favourable to the consumer." You don't see that too often in codes from governments and such that we're going to be favouring the customer going forward. After all, this whole debate is about putting consumers first, so I think we have some very positive things happening toward that end.

1540

Given that there are overlaps in the federal and provincial governments, I want to take time to go over some of the things that the CRTC has included in its national wireless code of conduct in an effort to compare it to Bill 60.

A big part of the debate on consumer protection in the mobile phone market revolves around clarity. In the CRTC wireless code, service providers "must communicate with customers using plain language." They must also "ensure that its written contracts and related documents, such as privacy policies and fair use policies, are written in a way that is clear and easy for customers to read and understand."

Finally, "A service provider must ensure that the prices set out in the contract are clear and must indicate whether these prices include taxes."

I believe this commitment to plain language is important. I'm pleased to see that we also have this provision in Bill 60. As you see, we're not all lawyers. The member for Bramalea-Gore-Malton over here is a lawyer. He's a good guy. But most of us are not lawyers, so it helps when the contract into which we're entering can be expressed in simple, easy-to-understand terms.

The CRTC code also stipulates that, "A service provider must not charge a customer any overage charge for services purchased on an unlimited basis."

Further, "A service provider must not limit the use of service purchased on an unlimited basis unless these limits are clearly explained in the fair use policy."

Here we do find a deficiency, though, Mr. Speaker, in Bill 60. There does not appear to be anything regarding overage charges on unlimited services. Perhaps this is something we can clear up when we take this bill to committee in the next few weeks.

The CRTC code also addresses the issue of postpaid and prepaid contracts. For instance, regarding postpaid contracts, key contract terms and conditions must include, "(a) the services included in the contract and any limits on the use of these services that could trigger overage charges or additional fees;

"(b) the minimum monthly charge for services included in the contract;

"(c) the commitment period, including the end date of the contract;

"(d) if applicable,

"(i) the total early cancellation fee;

"(ii) the amount by which the early cancellation fee will decrease each month; and

"(iii) the date on which the customer will no longer be subject to the early cancellation fee;"

This will help consumers better understand the terms of their wireless plan and have a better idea regarding cancellation fees which can take many of us by surprise.

Prepaid providers must also provide detail on the terms and conditions. Bill 60, unfortunately, fails to provide guidance on the transaction of prepaid contracts.

Another big issue many wireless customers face has to do with their providers altering certain aspects of their contract.

Under the CRTC code, the following provisions must be upheld: “(i) A service provider must not change the key contract terms and conditions of a postpaid wireless contract during the commitment period without the customer’s informed and express consent.

“(ii) When a service provider notifies a customer that it intends to change a key contract term or condition during the commitment period, the customer may refuse the change.

“(iii) As an exception, a service provider may only change a key contract term or condition during the commitment period without the customer’s express consent if it clearly benefits the customer by either

“(iv) reducing the rate for a single service; or

“(v) increasing the customer’s usage allowance for a single service.”

Bill 60 also addresses changes to contracts by a supplier. When I first read through the sections of Bill 60 that dealt with this, I found the wording to be somewhat vague. However, I’m confident that between the CRTC code and Bill 60 consumers will be well protected against unilateral contract changes.

The next aspect I’d like to address is bill management with regard to roaming charges. I know I’m not alone in driving up my monthly cell bill after spending a weekend in the States. I can tell you that many people you talk to—Americans who do have their cell charges, they do not compare to what we are charged when we get home, and I think it’s time that we need to take a look at it.

It’s examples like these that I’ve just mentioned that necessitate robust protection when it comes to roaming charges. For instance, the CRTC code states that, “(i) A service provider must notify the customer, at no charge, when their device is roaming in another country. The notification must clearly explain the associated rates for voice, text messaging, and data services.” A provider must also put a cap on data roaming charges. All national and international data roaming charges must be suspended “once they reach \$100 within a single monthly billing cycle, unless the customer expressly consents to pay additional charges.

“ii. A service provider must provide this cap at no charge.”

As for data overage charges: “A service provider must suspend data overage charges once they reach \$50 within a single monthly billing cycle, unless the customer expressly consents to pay additional charges.” To anyone who has taken a mobile device abroad, this provision is welcome news. Bill 60, unfortunately, overlooks this aspect.

Regarding cancellations, I’m pleased that both the CRTC code and Bill 60 address the issue. The CRTC code states: “If a customer cancels a contract before the end of the commitment period, the service provider must not charge the customer any fee or penalty other than the

early cancellation fee. This fee must be calculated in the manner set out” as follows.

For fixed-term contract—subsidized devices: “The early cancellation fee must not exceed the value of the device subsidy. The early cancellation fee must be reduced by an equal amount each month, for the lesser of 24 months or the total number of months in the contract term, such that the early cancellation fee is reduced to \$0 by the end of the period.”

For fixed-term contracts—non-subsidized devices: “The early cancellation fee must not exceed the lesser of \$50 or 10 percent of the minimum monthly charge for the remaining months of the contract, up to a maximum of 24 months. The early cancellation fee must be reduced to \$0 by the end of the period.”

As I said, both the province and the CRTC have addressed the issue in a similar manner.

Another important aspect in the relationship between wireless customers and their providers has to do with a trial period or cooling-off period. With most contracts locking you in for three years, it would be nice for the wireless plan to have a little test drive at first. Bill 60, when enacted, would provide a 10-day cooling off period. The CRTC, though, sets out a 30-day cooling-off period, and I think this aspect is a no-brainer. I think everyone in this room would prefer a 30-day cooling-off period as opposed to a 10-day period. I’m not sure where the ministry got such a contradictory threshold, but I’d like to think the federal regulator has good reason for putting it at 30 days.

Regarding disconnection of the mobile service for things like unpaid bills, Bill 60 fails to provide any guidelines. Luckily, the CRTC has seen it fit to provide the following:

“(i) If the grounds for disconnecting a customer are failure to pay, a service provider can disconnect a customer’s postpaid service only if the customer

“(a) fails to pay an account that is past due, provided it exceeds \$50 or has been past due for more than two months;

“(b) fails to provide or maintain a reasonable security deposit or alternative when requested to do so by the service provider; or

“(c) agreed to a deferred payment plan with the service provider and fails to comply with the terms of this plan.

“(ii) Except with customer consent or in other exceptional circumstances, disconnection may occur only on weekdays between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. or on weekends between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., unless the weekday or weekend day precedes a statutory holiday, in which case disconnection may not occur after noon. The applicable time is that of the customer’s declared place of residence.

“(iii) If a service provider disconnects a customer in error, the service provider must restore service to the customer by the end of the next business day and must not impose reconnection charges.”

There’s one more thing I’d like to highlight in my time here. While it’s a small item in this bill, it speaks to some

of the broader differences between our party and the Liberals. This has to do with competition. Bill 60, when dealing with the issue of notification for excess usage charges, seeks to put in place regulations sometime in the future; however, at this point, there's no mention of making use of the fairly large market for free and cheap mobile applications. In other words, there's already a market mechanism by which can address this problem; however, this government thinks it has the ability to monitor, regulate and steer things the right way.

I believe competition and the market can be effective tools to address certain public problems and also to deal with the lack of customer service we now see in our wireless market.

I'll take you back to an instance in my own riding of Elgin–Middlesex–London. Since the pharmacists are here today, I'll use pharmacy as an indication. In St. Thomas alone we have three Shoppers Drug Marts, three independent pharmacies, a Walmart super store pharmacy, and a Yurek Pharmacy. Mr. Speaker, there are nine different pharmacies, and you would think that, in that marketplace, there's service for everybody, which there is. There's also competition to gain other customers. When you can't do it by price, you'll notice a lot of the other people do it by service. That way, you get bidding for your customers through price and/or service.

What's lacking in our marketplace now is, we have the big three—Telus, Rogers and Bell—with control of the system. There is no real reason to compete on service, and I think that's where a lot of our problems stem. They've gotten so big—and they don't have to compete for service—that the service that people are receiving in the wireless marketplace isn't occurring the way we would like to see it.

1550

I think it would be very, very interesting to see, even though the Big Three fought off bringing competition into the marketplace, the fact that if there were other providers out there who can't really beat you all the time on price but could actually provide a service where you didn't have to worry about cancelling your contract and those extra fees, or they gave you a good service on your roaming charges—the things we're arguing about in this bill. There would be someone out there to provide that competition, which actually might instill the Big Three to actually start competing and bringing these advantages to the marketplace without having it regulated by the government. I think this is a big, big opportunity for competition in the marketplace.

I'll even refer it over to the auto insurance file. You might think we have huge competition in auto insurance in Ontario; however, there are many players staying out of the business because it has been over-regulated by the government. The government controls the pricing of the product, and they control what's in the product, which has kept a lot of competitors out of the marketplace. For places like the GTA and Toronto, that has cut down the competition, which we have seen, as we've seen that prices are too high in auto insurance in this province,

particularly in the GTA and Toronto area. Because there's no competition to bring down and lower the prices—because of the stifling regulation and red tape this government has put upon the insurance business—we are seeing the complaints and the big fight that went on in the last budget process.

If they would open up and reduce the red tape; file a new system which would allow individual insurance companies to compete with each other on price; fix the dispute resolution mechanism in order to ensure that people get the treatment they need quickly and as soon as possible within the 60 days, as regulated, as opposed to the 414 days they're now waiting; and deal with the fraud situation that's going on, we would see our auto insurance rates continually go down.

What I'm saying here is, the government can't induce competition into the market by regulation. What they need to do is step back and ensure that they're protecting the consumer but allowing the industry itself to start to compete with one another to lower our prices and give us the services that we really need.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I think the intent of this bill is good, and I will be supporting it, along with the other members of the party. I think there are numerous deficiencies, as I've mentioned throughout the speech, that we can address in committee. I'm hoping the government is open to hearing the amendments coming forward so we can truly make this a wonderful bill: protecting the consumers without overlapping what's going on in the federal marketplace, and hopefully, when it comes around again, getting more competition in the marketplace—and that the people who are clamouring for higher rates don't fight because there's competition, too. Competition will lower prices. Together, we can have an open wireless market like other places in the world and have lower rates—not necessarily having the highest rates in the western hemisphere due to the fact that there is really no competition in Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: I have to say that, normally, I don't always agree with the notion of just a broad-based competition model as a solution to our problems, but I have to give credit to the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London with respect to our cellphones and the fact that our cellphone rates are some of the highest in the entire world. Perhaps he has a point when he talks about the lack of competition in that particular field—in particular when it comes to our cellphone services.

I think there's an argument to be made that where it comes to not only the rates but also the service and the quality of service we receive, many people have complained time and time again—many of my constituents—that the service they receive from any of the Big Three is less than stellar, less than what they would like to see. So I think that's a strong point.

My only concern is that we don't accept the proposition that open competition always results in lower rates. We've seen very well in the energy sector that privatiz-

ation of the energy sector, which was supposed to lead to competition, has not at all reduced our rates when it comes to energy. Our rates have actually gone up, and that has been strong evidence in my mind of the weakness of the argument that competition will always breed lower rates. But in this particular area, I think the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London makes a good point.

With respect to the two levels of the bill, the fact that we have a federal bill and a provincial bill, I initially had made the assertion that we really didn't need to bring this bill forward at this particular time, given that we've already addressed it federally. But now that we have both, there are ways to work together to make sure that the bills don't conflict—that's one of the most important things—and that they work together to provide the strongest protection to consumers in Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Vic Dhillon: I'm happy to rise and speak to Bill 60, the Wireless Services Agreements Act. It's a bill which intends to make the everyday lives of Ontarians easier for the consumers who do use cellphones.

Cellphones and the cellphone industry have evolved quite a bit over the past two decades, and so have the problems. I think this bill goes directly to solve some of those problems, or a majority of those problems, which have been brought to the attention of the Ministry of Consumer Services.

Cellphones have become a part of our lives for most of us. In fact, today I forgot my cellphone at home—my BlackBerry. Although it's not the end of the world, I'll survive—and for those people who are watching and trying to contact me, I will return your call, or I will respond to your emails this evening—but I feel something is missing. So that's how much cellphones have become a big role in our lives.

We're looking forward to getting this bill to the committee so that we can move forward and listen to the folks, like I said before, listen to people who want to make contributions at committee for some of the things we may not have covered during this debate.

I thank you very much, Speaker, and again, I look forward to seeing this bill in committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I listened attentively to the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London. The reason I'm sort of choked up is, I was surprised that his normal critic, the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton—they've been struggling on the insurance file and talking about competition, and it was more or less a compliment to the member from Elgin–Middle–London in his remarks.

A couple of things that I agreed with: the member from Elgin's comment with respect to plain language. That, of course, is one of the objectives here. I should say for the viewer here that this is kind of a moot point, but in the program motion of last week that was voted on, Bill 60 is referred to a committee and it's time-allocated, so all of this thing that talk is about time—it's going to

go to committee. That's been predetermined by that program motion.

So I think the point that's being made, though, is that competition—and that's the other point—should lead to lower rates. That's always been—our leader, Tim Hudak, espouses that virtue in almost every aspect.

But that seems to be the case: The federal government has complete control of that file. Nothing in this bill has anything to do with that. That's all under federal regulation of the CRTC.

We've talked about this from about 2011 when it was introduced by David Orziatti, so there has been more said than has actually been done. I'd say that, if they hadn't prorogued the House, of course, this thing would have been law by now. I don't know why they're dragging their feet on it so much. But, nonetheless, our leader had the—"Let's clear the deck here and get on with business." So we support it. It's protection for consumers.

The member from Brampton West: Your remarks there earlier today were encouraging. Thank you for the work. It's too bad you left your phone at home.

Also, the other last little comment is that in normal circumstances, unless government intervenes, competition does lower price. That's something this government has never done, and I think it's long overdue, and the federal government is doing it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm happy to stand here today, representing the constituents of London–Fanshawe on this bill and comment on the member from Elgin–Middlesex–London on his debate speech about this bill.

Technology has come so far and wide in our lives, and it's about time that this bill has been brought forward. The member from High Park—

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Parkdale–High Park.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: —Parkdale–High Park mentioned the size of a cellphone when they first came out. They were as big as bricks, and they were as heavy as bricks. The cost of them was phenomenal. They were really expensive. As technologies progress, we now see much sleeker cellphones. They're very light; you can put them in your pocket. The use of them and the functions they have are endless, to some degree.

1600

We do need to have this bill passed to make sure there are contracts with plain language, because when we enter into these cellphone contracts, we are making a commitment. If we don't understand explicitly what our commitment is to that contract, and what's more important, what the provider's commitment is to us, that's where people get frustrated. They don't think they're getting the service they need or the service they bought or what they signed up for. You know: "I didn't know I could get this for less cost," or, "I didn't know this would cost me so much when I wanted to cancel." So it's really important to make sure that people understand the contract language—it's plain; it's explainable to them—and they

don't feel they're entering into something they weren't prepared to do if they knew what all the terms were.

I'm glad to see that this was brought forward, but I do think it needs to go to committee so we can make sure that the consumers benefit from this bill with wireless contracts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That concludes the time for questions and comments. We return to the member for London–Middlesex—sorry—Elgin–Middlesex–London for his reply.

Mr. Jeff Yurek: It all works at the end of the day, Speaker. Thanks very much.

I'd like to thank those who commented on my debate: the member from Bramalea–Gore–Malton, an excellent lawyer who made some remarks; Brampton West, sorry about your phone, but it will be there when you get home; the member from Durham, one of the leading thought-provoking conversationalists of our party; and, of course, my neighbour in London–Fanshawe, thank you very much for those comments.

I think the key point of this is that much of this legislation is overlapping what's happening at the federal level. I think we could have taken this bill and strengthened where the weak parts are in the federal legislation in order to ensure that our consumers are protected.

As I said before, overall I think the federal government should be looking further at trying to increase competition in the wireless marketplace so that we can have rates coming down. It's interesting to note that when government gets in the way—much in the paper today to do with usage-based telematics for the auto insurance product. What's really stopping this product from hitting the market full steam is, of course, our provincial regulator, FSCO. I know they do have to make the regulatory body in order to protect the consumer, but they've been working on this issue for over two years now and only one major company has been allowed, really, to bring this product out in the marketplace. I feel that giving that new option, which introduces competition in the auto insurance market, will help reduce rates while of course protecting the consumer.

But anyway, back to wireless rates, I'm just going to give a plug. I just hope everybody doesn't give up on Canadian-owned BlackBerry, a strong company, which most of us do have and use. Hopefully, 10 years down the road we still have a BlackBerry product that we're using, and that the Ontario Legislature does not give up on this product and ensures that all MPPs are using the BlackBerry.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate? Further debate?

Pursuant to the order of the House dated October 3, 2013, there having been almost 6.5 hours of debate on Bill 60, I'm now required to put the question.

On September 10, Ms. MacCharles moved second reading of Bill 60. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour will please say "aye."

All those opposed will say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

I have received a deferral notice from the chief government whip asking that the vote be deferred until tomorrow during the time for deferred votes.

Second reading vote deferred.

SUPPORTING SMALL BUSINESSES ACT, 2013

LOI DE 2013 VISANT À SOUTENIR LES PETITES ENTREPRISES

Resuming the debate adjourned on October 2, 2013, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 105, An Act to amend the Employer Health Tax Act / Projet de loi 105, Loi modifiant la Loi sur l'impôt-santé des employeurs.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I must warn my friends in North Bay to settle in and settle down and relax on the couch for an hour because I'm going to be talking for one hour, Speaker. I just wanted to let Patty know, and let my mum at home know as well: You're going to listen to your boy for an hour.

Ms. Cheri DiNovo: Put the kettle on.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Put the kettle on, precisely.

I rise to address Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act, the government's employer health tax legislation. I'm going to come out guns blazing. It would be more aptly named the "supporting small business while we stick it to them 100 other ways act."

Interjections.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Zing.

Over the course of the next hour, I will be outlining the framework of the destructive policies this government has implemented over the last 10 years which have made this the lost decade. I'd like to point out that it was a PC government which first introduced this exemption as a way to assist small business in this province by reducing the overall tax burden. The Liberals have had 10 years to offer relief to small business, but only now are they acting. Quite frankly, it's too little too late.

For me and for my caucus colleagues, this legislation introduced today exemplifies exactly what is wrong with this government and their approach to governing. They're unwilling to go far enough to take the decisive action that is needed to provide real tax relief for Ontario businesses. This is more what I like to call tinkering around the edges by this government. It will not do enough to solve the jobs crisis that is so prevalent in this province and get the more than half a million men and women who woke up this morning without a job back to work.

We need to put this legislation in context with the overall framework that this government has laid out, which is actually driving jobs away and hurting business. It's driving investment out of Ontario; they're fleeing for

more friendly places to do business. This bill fails to address the structural costs facing job creators.

In order to talk about why this is not sufficient, I think we need to understand the problem that we have in Ontario, Speaker. I am going to read a couple of op-ed pieces that I have written that have been published in most newspapers in Ontario. This one is almost a year old but it starts with the quote, "I do not want Ontario to become like California," and that's a statement by Dwight Duncan, former finance minister, September 20, 2012. It's about a year ago he said that. The article that ran in many newspapers, from the Windsor Star to the Kingston Whig-Standard, is called "California Dreaming, Ontario's Nightmare."

It says, "The dismal financial situations facing Ontario and California are clearly compared in" several "recently released" studies. "Both jurisdictions have crushing deficits of" comparable size. "Sadly for us, California is about three times our size, making it a fiscal darling compared to us.

"After reading many similar articles," my wife Patty and "I headed to California to see firsthand what Ontario might look like in the near future.

"My wife Patty and I have many fond memories of our trips through California. You can imagine our surprise this trip at the sight of garbage piling up along the highway between San Francisco and Stockton, the city that joined San Bernardino and Vallejo in declaring bankruptcy. These three are the tip of the iceberg; many more cities are teetering on the edge.

"Assigning blame for California's problems depends on which side of the political spectrum you fall. The right points the finger at high public sector wages and generous pensions and benefits." Sounds familiar in Ontario. "The left blames the bursting of the real estate bubble. What cannot be disputed is the fact that the cities in bankruptcy overspent. When assessments fell, revenues fell—and they couldn't pay their bills.

1610

According to Michael Lewis's book *Boomerang*—a book that I would highly recommend to all of us in this Legislature—Vallejo is the city to pity most. Patty and I drove through this community.

"The lobby of city hall is completely empty. It's just a collection of empty cubicles. Eighty per cent of the city's budget—and the lion's share of the claims that had thrown it into bankruptcy—were wrapped up in pay and benefits."

"Now, the city manager runs the entire city of 116,000 with a staff of one. 'When she goes out to the bathroom, she has to lock the door'" of city hall.

"On our trip, we passed hundreds of wind turbines as we drove to the historic community of Sonora. This is the heart of gold country, established in the original gold rush of 1849," a place where I have panned for gold for the last 25 years. "Today, thanks to expensive energy, the mines are closed and the logging operations are silent. Museums were closed because of staffing cuts. The streets were empty. But we did see was a lot of casinos!"

The comparison to Ontario is inevitable. "Mine processors here have closed—Xstrata Copper in Timmins shed 670 employees and moved to Quebec for cheaper power. We were the number one mining jurisdiction in the world; today, we've fallen to" number 17. "The forestry sector is devastated—there are 60 closed mills today." That's 80% of all of the mills." The Far North Act has banned logging and mining exploration from another 225,000 square kilometres of land.

"As in California, wind turbines are popping up in rural Ontario. But our turbines are offered ... the highest subsidies in the world. This has caused energy rates in Ontario to rise to the second-highest in North America behind PEI.

"The Liberals have cancelled the Slots at Racetracks Program, which netted the province \$1.2 billion annually," opting to sprinkle 29 casinos throughout Ontario. In my op-ed, I asked this simple question: "Is that the best we can do?"

"We have 600,000 unemployed in Ontario today. There are 300,000 fewer manufacturing jobs. These people need hope, not another short-term money grab by a government unable to control its tax-and-spend ways.

"California used to be the ultimate realization of the American dream. Similarly, Ontario was once the engine of Confederation. Both have fallen on hard times, but as usual California is leading the way. If we heed the warning of Stockton, San Bernardino, Vallejo and many other cities on the verge of bankruptcy, Ontario can lead again.

"And we can avoid turning the nightmare into reality."

That was the first of the op-eds that I wrote. I'm going to read a couple more shortly, but I want to take some time to talk about why this minuscule movement, this Bill 105 on behalf of the Liberals toward helping small business, isn't nearly enough to reverse the damage they've done over the lost decade.

I'd like to start off by discussing our debt, which has doubled in just 10 years. It took 20-some Premiers 136 years to run up a debt of \$139 billion. Today, with only 10 years under their belt, the Liberals have doubled that debt to \$273 billion. It's at a record level. The deficit has pushed the envelope.

It's a must that the budget be balanced, and that we get it balanced before 2017. It's a must that Ontarians finally get a break in our tax rates, and that we get out of the business of corporate welfare. We must advocate for free trade and make sure that happens.

Our Paths to Prosperity, of which we have 14 versions, from health to education to energy and everything in between, must be a two-way street. Those 200 ideas—we must have some give and some take. As PC finance critic, I see a road back—a road that won't be easy, but it can be travelled, and we will travel it as a team that wants nothing but the best for Ontario.

We on this side of the House want Ontarians to be proud again. We want Ontarians to be working, and working in jobs that bring personal pride as well as a decent income.

This legislation comes at a time when we're struggling with skyrocketing hydro costs. Our hydro rates have doubled under this government. We have new taxes. We have increases to the WSIB premiums, another tax this year, and a College of Trades tax, another tax this year. I'll be talking a little bit more about both of those in a moment.

We have restrictions on the skilled trades through outdated apprenticeship ratios, and a forest of red tape and regulations that strangle the ability of Ontario businesses to prosper.

Again, Speaker, it's hard for us to talk about the things we want to go ahead and do in Ontario and why our white papers have the types of discussion papers in them if you don't understand how very serious our crisis is.

A moment ago, I read my op-ed piece about California, when so many national organizations compared us to California. Now I'd like to read my op-ed piece that ran, again, from one end of the province to the other and all through the north. This one is going to be the next crisis that we talk about, and I called this op-ed piece "My Big Fat Greek Ontario Government."

I sat through the new Liberal government's first budget, and all I can say is, "Opa!" We may well be on our way to a Greek-style meltdown.

"You don't need to be an economist" named Drummond "to know that Ontario is where Greece was in the 1980s. From 1984-94"—

Interjection.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I know this might be a little complicated for you, but I ask you to listen—"Greece's net debt-to-GDP ratio went from 37% to 66%. Today, Ontario is at 37% and if we maintain our current spending rate, we too will reach 66% by 2019."

The Drummond report "was a siren call to Ontario: Fix this now or it will destroy you. Instead, last year we saw spending actually up \$3.6 billion, while revenue was up only \$2.6 billion." Remember, this was a year ago when this op-ed ran. "We definitely don't have a revenue problem in Ontario; we have a spending problem.

"Our debt is not a function of the global recession or tsunami, as I continue to hear in the Legislature. It's the refusal of the government to control spending, and their lack of political will to balance the budget. Low interest rates make carrying this large debt possible, but even the slightest increase in rates" will cause trauma for the budget.

I recently attended a luncheon where speaker Niels Veldhuis presented Ontarian's Debt: Surpassing California, Heading for Greece. "He told us that over the last nine years, our GDP was up 3.3% while our program spending went up 6.6%. Had we just matched our spending to the GDP rate"—again, this is a year old—"last year's budget would have been \$91 billion instead of \$115 billion—and yes, that would have meant a surplus as opposed to a deficit.

"The solutions to Ontario's problems aren't hard to figure out; they're just not easy to do. Ontario needs a government that has a plan to reduce spending and create

jobs, and the courage to implement it. But it's hard to justify these tough decisions if people don't know how serious the problem is here in Ontario.

"The budget presented to Ontarians offers no reform, shows no sense of understanding the severity of our debt crisis, or the urgency required to fix the problem." It appears Ontario is headed to become the next Greek tragedy.

Let's look at energy rates and what has happened, especially given that today is the three-year anniversary of the Oakville power plant cancellation. We on this side are most eager to see what the Auditor General has to say tomorrow, as are Ontarians struggling with their hydro bill to be able to calculate how much this is going to send your hydro bills up on November 1.

1620

Ontario's industrial rates are the second-highest in North America. The global adjustment charge is simply the government's catch-all fund for the misdeeds and mistakes they've made in the energy file, including the power plant cancellations. This has hit a record. Last month, global adjustment hit 8.72 cents a kilowatt hour. That's not the price of energy; that's just the extra price for the spilling of water over Niagara Falls, the venting of steam out of the nuclear plants, to allow the wind to come online whenever it does get made—8.72 cents a kilowatt hour, just the extra. Add that to your energy rate.

When these guys took power, Speaker, entire energy was only 4.4 cents a kilowatt hour. Now the global adjustment itself is twice that amount, never mind the price of energy. Energy rates surpass taxes as the number one concern of Ontario businesses for the first time ever.

Let me take a bit of time to specifically address the Green Energy Act and how this legislation can't possibly do enough to reverse the damage done since it came into existence over four years ago.

First of all, Speaker, let me tell you that the Liberals have a great way of naming their bills. Of course, this one, aptly, as I said, is named the Supporting Small Businesses Act. It should be called the "supporting small business while we stick it to them 100 other ways act." They have a great way of naming their acts.

The Green Energy Act: There is absolutely nothing—zero, nothing—green about the Green Energy Act.

Speaker, when you and I grew up in our Ontario—both of us are from northern Ontario—we know that water power played a significant role in our energy portfolio. I can tell you that water power, when the Green Energy Act was first implemented, was 25% of all of the energy in Ontario. Some 25% of all of our energy came from water power. Now, that is the cleanest, the greenest, the most reliable, unlike wind, and the most affordable, unlike wind. That has now fallen from 25% to 22%, and wind power has gone from 0% to 3%. Our green energy years ago, when this thing started, was 25%; that's how much renewable we had. Today, after all of these billions of dollars that this government has wasted, we still have—surprise—25% of our energy that comes from renewable green energy.

So what's so green about the Green Energy Act when it did not create one megawatt—not one kilowatt—of new green energy for Ontario? Again, they have a great way of naming this.

But the worst thing about all this is wind power, which is so unreliable. We pay for 1,800 megawatts of power to be made from wind. Two weeks ago, at 9 o'clock in the morning—again, we pay billions of dollars for 1,817 megawatts—we made two megawatts of wind. Thank God we weren't relying on that power. By 11 o'clock, it had roared all the way up to three megawatts of power. Again, we pay for 1,817 megawatts.

The folly of this ill-named act is also that not only do we pay the richest subsidy; we also tell these wind producers that we will pay them whenever their power is made. The Auditor General told us that one of the flaws in this whole Green Energy Act is that there was no business plan done. It was forced by former Energy Minister George Smitherman on his caucus and his cabinet, much to their surprise, but no business plan was done. Had they done a business plan, they would have acknowledged and they would have understood that wind power is made at night, and in Ontario that's power we don't need at night.

So what do we do? According to the Auditor General, for the first 10 months in 2011 we paid \$420 million to Quebec and the States to take that wind power that was made at night. It's up to \$500 million a year. It averages \$500 million a year. That goes in that global adjustment, that 8.72 cents a kilowatt hour. That's a heck of a pile of money, considering power used to be 4.4 cents.

Now we've got half a million dollars a year that we're paying to Quebec and the United States, but every once in a while, at noon, the wind does blow and blow it does, and what do we have to do? We have to take that power. Even though we've already contracted for nuclear and water for that day, we have to take that power. What has happened is, the government makes the phone call to OPG down at Niagara Falls and tells them, "Spill your water over Niagara Falls and don't capture any of that power." How much did it cost us last year to spill water? It cost us \$300 million to spill water over Niagara Falls last year without capturing the power. Why? Because we had to take the wind power because wind happened to be made that day.

Now, when it really blows and we can't spill any more water, we commit the ultimate sin. We call our nuclear plants and tell them to vent their steam. They've used that nuclear power to boil that water, make the steam—and instead of powering a generator, vent that steam out into the atmosphere. That's what they're ordered to do. They were ordered five times last year. Do you know how much that cost us, Speaker? We paid \$80 million for that steam that was vented out the door. There's \$500 million. There's \$300 million. There's \$80 million. That's almost \$1 billion itself—almost \$1 billion itself in wasted money that goes on your global adjustment to try to make up for the flaws of this wind power folly, never mind the rich subsidy we pay.

But what are the consequences of that? Why am I telling you that? It's money, yes. Your hydro bill—all of you in the gallery—your hydro bill doubled under this government. It doubled. It went from 4.4 cents to 8.8 cents a year ago, and it's going up again in November.

But it didn't do just that. We didn't just spill water and vent steam. We drained jobs. Let me tell you an example. The Auditor General told us that for every one job that's created in the so-called green energy, we lost almost three jobs—some references are more—in other businesses whose power went up. Xstrata Copper in Timmins is the classic example. This is a company that's been there for decades. They're processing copper.

Mr. Bill Walker: The biggest consumer—

Mr. Victor Fedeli: They're the single largest consumer of power in all of Ontario—300 megawatts—bigger than any car plant in southern Ontario, any mine—300 megawatts. Remember, we pay Quebec a couple of cents to take our power, every megawatt. They knock on Xstrata Cooper's door and say, "Why are you guys still in Ontario? Why don't you cross the border 70 kilometres away for cheap power?" You know what? They did that. They crossed the border, moved into Quebec, 115 kilometres over the border, and reopened there. They shed 672 jobs in a community of 45,000 people. They then tore the building down so they don't even pay property taxes there. Can you blame them? This so-called green energy is like opening a treasure chest and telling the people, "Just dig in. Dig into the coins." It's such a rich subsidy.

Solar: That's another story when it comes to rich subsidies, Speaker. But last year, as I said, energy rates surpassed taxes as the number one concern of Ontario businesses for the first time.

This legislation will do little to bring back the 300,000 manufacturing jobs that we've lost in Ontario under this Liberal government. If we continue with this Liberal government's energy policies, those 300,000 jobs won't be coming back. As I said, our industrial rates are the second-highest in North America, but we need to make energy—affordable energy—a priority in Ontario and we will cancel the FIT program and the costly subsidies. The PCs will implement an industrial and a resource energy rate. That's how we're going to put people back to work. We're going to do it with affordable energy.

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You've already heard me talk about how this legislation does very little for small business. It tinkers at the edges. The real problem is that they're not addressing the issues that have caused these 300,000 job losses—the WSIB new tax.

You've got new taxes all around. You've got the College of Trades tax. Let me tell you a story about the College of Trades tax. This is a really scary story, Speaker. I will not tell you the name of the community or the name of the person, but I have received an email from this person. With their blessing, I can tell the story, but when you hear the story you'll know why I can't use their name or the city.

He's a barber in a small community in my riding, and so he is the only barber in that town. He does not want his town even mentioned because the College of Trades will know it's him.

Interjection.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's not my town. My town is North Bay and we have several barbers.

He was cutting the hair of a friend of mine and two of the College of Trades people came in and interrupted the haircut.

Interjection: The trades cops.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: The trades cops, in uniform, with their marked car outside, came in and spent 10 minutes in the middle of this barber's haircut—as I said, with a friend of mine—demanding to talk to him about paying his College of Trades tax.

The College of Trades, as we know, is nothing more than a tax grab. It does absolutely nothing. They take the cash from the trades—from hairdressers, from barbers, from contractors, from all of the trades—to pay themselves. It's a self-funding organization. It serves no other role than a tax grab of Ontarians.

I have had the Chamber of Commerce support this, come into my office, sign a pledge with me and witness my pledge that I signed to cancel the College of Trades tax, because that's what's killing business—one of the litany of Liberal programs that is killing business in Ontario. That's what's wrong with Ontario, not tinkering on the edges with this Bill 105.

Speaker, another tax that was implemented this year is the WSIB. Do you remember that? I think it was Bill 119 or 191—

Interjection.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Bill 119, in the last Legislature. What this government has done is somehow put yet another tax on hardworking men and women in the construction trades. This WSIB tax is now a tax on the family-owned businesses where it could be—

Mr. John O'Toole: It's a payroll tax.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It's a payroll tax, in essence. It's for the owner and their spouse. This is a tax that they didn't have to pay before, but now they're forced to pay WSIB for themselves.

Now, let me tell you, Speaker, every one of these owners—and all have lined up in my office—would have had huge insurance policies for themselves because they know that if they get hurt on the job, they're not going to be able to work, and when they don't work, they don't have any revenue. So they have been funding their own excellent insurance policies and premiums for decades.

Now, this little piddly one comes along that bugs them for another \$1,000 or up to \$10,000 that they're paying for inadequate insurance. They can't let their own premium go. They've paid into it for too long and it's much better. This WSIB is not adequate for them as the owner, but now they're forced. Their arm is twisted and put behind their back to pay that additional tax.

I had an entourage of them come into our office as well, and all asked us to fix the WSIB folly. That's

another area that we believe is action to put these 300,000 men and women back to work, not this tinkering around the edges that we're seeing. It's pitiful to see that, Speaker, I have to tell you. I'm very disappointed—tax after tax after tax.

Two budgets ago, the business community was looking forward to the reduction in corporate tax from 11.5% down to 10%. What happened? Cancelled.

This government has absolutely no idea how to govern without raising taxes. I can tell you, in the gas plant scandal files the one document that really caught my eye was the Big Move, and what their default action was to pay for the \$50 billion worth of transit and infrastructure expenditures that are necessary between Toronto and Hamilton. They need \$50 billion over the next two decades or two and a half decades, \$2 billion a year. What is their absolute immediate go-to response? Raise taxes.

Not only did their agency suggest that they add 1% to the HST and add five cents a litre to every litre of gas that you purchase, as if those weren't enough and bad enough, now we've got, in the gas plant scandal, documents from finance and treasury—we read, in this Legislature, the list of some of these expenses, or some of these new taxes. They want to add 75 cents to your phone bill as a tax to pay for Toronto and Hamilton transit. They continue to deny all these.

One of them was that we're going to raise driver licence fees. Of course that happened a couple of weeks ago. Deny one day, implement the next, that's what we've seen from this government for far too long now.

They want to raise hunting and fishing licences, the fees for hunting and fishing, which is particularly hard on the northern community. That's what they want to raise to pay for Toronto and Hamilton transit. Their immediate go-to is, "Which taxes can we get away with raising?"

Mr. John O'Toole: Driver licences.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: It was driver licences, as I've mentioned. They did that. They did implement that. Right?

Their reaction was not, "Where can we look for efficiencies?" In this almost \$140-billion budget, you think you can't find not even 2%—\$2 billion—1.5%? You can't even find that in that budget?

Your reaction was to simply raise taxes. That's all they know how to do. Tax and spend. Tax and spend. That's all they know what to do.

Mr. John O'Toole: No; spend and then tax.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: My fellow caucus member is right. In their case, it's spend and then tax, which is why, of course, we continue to have these deficits.

The legislation, Bill 105, that they're proposing, cannot possibly reverse the 10 years of wasteful spending and scandal that we've seen on this side. Perhaps if the government was more interested in helping small business than putting the Liberal Party's interests first, we could have seen more from them by now.

This legislation will do absolutely nothing, Speaker—nothing—to undo the \$1 billion that was wasted on

eHealth. This is a classic example of the kind of waste that we see from this government.

I don't hear anybody balking. They can't even deny that, Speaker. I enjoy the silence. They can't even deny that. It's \$1 billion that was wasted.

I wonder if the other members could come up with a list of what that \$1 billion could have bought us, how many MRI—never mind MRI procedures—how many MRIs this could have bought for Ontario. It's shocking.

We should have looked at that, and we should have known what to expect. That was early on in their government. We should have known that something's not right. Something's not right.

I'll jump to a more recent scandal, the Ornge scandal. In this case, we've seen human tragedy as a result of it. We've seen that, and it's a very sad scandal. But we've seen greed at the highest level. If you peel back how that came, you would understand it's all about their entitlements, and I'm going to talk a little bit more about that because, sadly, Speaker, this Bill 105 will do absolutely nothing.

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It's called the Supporting Small Businesses Act, and, Speaker, it does anything but support small business. In fact, if you look at the full package of Liberal policies, they're killing small business. They're killing big business. They're sending the Xstrata Coppers out of Ontario into Quebec. They're killing us.

Ornge is a classic example of the entitlement that they feel. Their fellow cousin, the former federal Liberal member Mr. Dingwall, said it best: "I am entitled to my entitlements." They live by that mantra, Speaker. I know they do. We're going to see a long litany of that coming up.

Bill 105 certainly can't go back and undo the disastrous decisions to cancel the Mississauga and Oakville power plants at a cost of \$585 million and rising. So, Speaker, I'm going to spend a few minutes talking about what that has done to small business, because tomorrow, when the auditor comes out with her number, we are going to have to get out a rather large calculator and see exactly what this is going to do to the business community, because we know the government here stands by their number. "It's \$40 million." In fact, we have sworn testimony. We have ministers who have stood in this Legislature and pointed their finger at us and said that the total cost of closing Oakville is \$40 million, and they rubbed their finger in our noses. "The total cost is \$40 million." Well, Speaker, the Auditor General will tell us the number. But in the meantime, the OPA has given us yet another number. It's a little different than this \$40 million that they swear. The Auditor General—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would ask the government members to please come to order so that I can hear the member for Nipissing.

I return to the member for Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker.

Interjection.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Member for Oakville, come to order.

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: Point of order, Speaker: I think we've all been quite patient on this side, but it would be nice if the speaker stuck to Bill 105.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Member for Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Auditor General tomorrow will tell us the true cost, the real cost. We've heard the \$40 million; we've heard that \$40 million. We've heard them swear in testimony on that number. Now, the Ontario Power Authority came out with their number, and it's \$1.1 billion, minus \$700 million in anticipated savings, equals \$310 million. So their bare number is \$310 million. We'll see how much of those savings the Auditor General comes up with, and see what of those savings she says don't qualify, and we'll learn the true number because that true number is going to show up on our hydro bills.

Speaker, when you talk about Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act, we've got a few things that can support small business. Come clean on the Oakville and Mississauga total so that we can now have you fess up and tell the business community and hard-working families in Ontario how much more their hydro bill is going to go up, because this extra cost to cancel Oakville is going to go into our global adjustment, as it's going to be presumably paid by the OPA, and that's going to raise our hydro rates. That does not help small business. That does not help any business. It does not help large business. It's what drove the Xstrata Coppers away. It's what's hurting families, and that's why energy is the number one issue today—even more concern than taxes.

You want to help small business? Let's talk about the latest scandal, the Pan Am Games. Please tell me what it could possibly do to help our small business when you've got parking bills and coffee bills, \$700,000 for—

Interjections.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I would indeed remind the House that this is a finance bill. Traditionally, in a leadoff speech on a finance bill, there's a little more latitude on the budgetary policy of the government, generally. At the same time, I must ask the member for Nipissing to come back to the subject of the bill from time to time, so as to ensure that the subject is being covered.

I return to the member for Nipissing.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Speaker. I have one paragraph left before I read the content of the bill, so I'll likely just finish off with that before I get back to it.

The \$700,000 for the athletes' village—I can go on and on, on this scandal. Again, it's built into this government: "I'm entitled to my entitlements." We hear that. We see that. We know that's in their very core, their very fibre, and does nothing to help small business.

For all of these reasons I've listed and so many others—some I still may circle back to—this legislation does little to improve the overall picture for small

business in Ontario and for our economy as a whole. Again, it's too little, too late.

I would like to address the specific content of the bill, which we do have some concerns with. The bill proposes to increase the exemption amount from \$400,000 to \$450,000 for the 2014 to 2018 calendar years, with the amount to be adjusted for inflation for each year starting in 2019. While the intent is to help small business, it's about time that the Liberals realized their policies are killing Ontario business and this just isn't enough in the overall context of the legislation or the government's policies as a whole.

It also proposes to implement a new exemption threshold for companies with payrolls of \$5 million or more. This is almost a zero-sum game. The government says it will help 60,000 small businesses, but it will mean that 5,000 businesses—many family-owned like the local Canadian Tire in North Bay, the local family-owned Independent Grocer in North Bay—companies that create jobs, will pay more.

Further, this hurts the ability to compete in the global marketplace by adding to their input costs. It supplies special rules for registered charities and for a group of employers associated with the registered charities, but it allows the minister to make regulations providing for special rules that apply to employers who are, or are associated with, registered charities.

We have concerns, of course, about the minister's ability to make arbitrary changes, through regulations, around these charities. I would remind you of one other scandal I haven't yet talked about: the cricket club that asked for \$150,000 and the treasure chest was opened up and they were given \$1 million, right? This is what happens. This is just setting the table for another Liberal minister to change the rules to benefit themselves.

Speaker, I'm now going to read to you my third op-ed piece. This was a very recent one that ran in many papers in Ontario. It, too, helps us understand the significant disastrous and precarious position that Ontario Northland—I'm sorry; that's coming up—that Ontario is in. We can't begin to talk about the things we need to do to correct the path Ontario is on if people—especially the people across the aisle—do not fully appreciate, fully understand and fully acknowledge that we are in crisis in Ontario. This particular op-ed piece is called "Ontario's Check Engine Light is On."

"The recent bankruptcy of Detroit is another warning sign to Ontario that without hitting the brakes, we too are headed for a fiscal cliff.

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"Detroit, once the very symbol of industrial might, filed what will be the largest municipal bankruptcy in US history. Their budget deficit is more than \$380 million and their long-term debt is estimated to be \$20 billion.

"The motor city's population declined from a peak of 1.8 million in the 1950s to 700,000" recently. "There are 78,000 abandoned structures. Police, fire, and ambulance services are unreliable—their fleets are in disrepair, and police response times average 58 minutes.

"In a letter approving the move, Governor Rick Snyder wrote: 'The city's creditors, as well as its many dedicated public servants, deserve to know what promises the city can and will keep. The only way to do those things is to radically restructure the city.' He added the decision follows decades of decline for Detroit, 'a period in which reality was often ignored.'"

Speaker, I have to go back to this. "The only way to do those things is to radically restructure the city." We need a restructuring of our province. "The decision follows decades of decline for Detroit"—we have been in decline in Ontario: 600,000 unemployed today, 300,000 fewer jobs in manufacturing, and we have a bill that is going to hurt businesses—"a period in which reality was often ignored." Is that starting to sound familiar? There's no reality check here. None. They're in denial. They're in denial of the 600,000 people, the 300,000 fewer manufacturing jobs.

"In many ways, Detroit is a warning light to the rest of the global economy, and especially to Ontario. Their debt is \$27,000 for each resident. In Ontario, we each owe \$20,000." Again, is that sounding familiar? "Detroit is estimated to owe \$9 billion for pensions and benefits. Here, our unfunded pension liability is estimated at \$100 billion; a problem that will only increase as baby boomers reach retirement.

"But the Detroit bankruptcy is only the latest warning sign that Ontario is headed down the wrong road. Over the last year, several studies have been released making other comparisons." I've read the studies out loud here.

"Ontario is now where Greece was in the 1980s. Their net debt-to-GDP ratio went from 37% to 66%. Today Ontario's is at 37%, and if we maintain the spending status quo, we too will reach 66% by 2019."

Speaker, as I read earlier, in my earlier op-ed, "Ontario and California also face similar dismal financial situations. Both jurisdictions have crushing deficits of comparable size. Sadly for us, California is about three times our size, making it a fiscal darling compared to us.

This party brought Don Drummond in to create a report and then put it on the shelf and didn't bother implementing many of the salient items, as we would do. "The Drummond report proved to us that the burden of eliminating our debt must fall on spending. It states, 'To balance the budget, the province must target a spending level in 2017-18 that is 17% lower than the sum found in the status quo scenario—a wrenching reduction from the path that spending is now on.'"

This is Don Drummond, the economist that the Liberals hired. They don't like what he had to say. They put it on the shelf and hoped that it would never see the light of day again. Instead of taking necessary action, the Liberals have taken us farther down the road with the same failed approach of the last decade.

"The solutions to Ontario's problems aren't hard to figure out—they're just not easy to do. Ontario needs a government that has a plan to reduce spending and create jobs, and the courage of their convictions to get the job done. Tim Hudak and the Ontario PCs have put forward

bold ideas in a series of 14 white papers to date, and stand ready to lead Ontario back from the brink and into prosperity.”

I end with this op-ed piece with “Without structural changes, our economy will be running on fumes—and we all know what happens next.”

I want to say thank you very much to the many newspapers throughout Ontario that have run this particular op-ed in the last week, and to the dozens of newspapers that ran my earlier op-ed, “California Dreaming, Ontario’s Nightmare,” and my other op-ed, “My Big Fat Greek Ontario Government.”

Some people chuckle at comparing us to Greece, but it’s a compelling story, a story that Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act, will do nothing to improve. This is going to admittedly assist some small businesses at the expense of slightly larger businesses. Again, in my hometown, the locally owned Canadian Tire will be affected. Our locally owned independent grocers will be affected. These are owned by men and women in the city. It’s like robbing one to pay the other. That’s what this is: It’s moving dollars around. It’s almost a net no gain, no loss.

I understand that, when all the math is done, it might cost the government about \$5 million. It’s not quite a wash, but it’s just moving money between one and the other, robbing Peter to pay Paul, which has happened with this Liberal government in almost all that we’ve seen. They need money? A WSIB tax. Tax those contractors. They make lots of money; let’s tax them.

Mr. John Yakabuski: They rob Peter; they don’t even bother paying Paul.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I sense a heckle from my own party, Speaker, from outside of the floor.

They need money? The College of Trades—let’s establish that, and let’s start taxing hairdressers and barbers. Let’s bully ourselves into their shop, interrupt the business that they’re doing, scare the person who’s in the chair and scare the people who are cutting their hair in our small towns in my riding.

It’s awful to see that their go-to is to raise taxes. It’s never, “How can we control our spending? How can we help Ontarians by bringing in a balanced budget?” It’s not about that. It’s all about—and I’m going to reverse the sentence, because it does work—“How can we spend, and then tax?” We’ve seen it in my short two years here. I have seen it over and over and over. They come up with great names for these bills, but I think that’s where they spent most of their time: on the name, and not the content. The content is tinkering at the edges.

It has done nothing. This will do nothing to put people to work. It will do nothing to help the people looking for work. It will do absolutely nothing for the 300,000 men and women who used to work in manufacturing. This is not going to lower hydro rates that we’ve seen double in the last decade. This isn’t going to fix the helicopters at Ornge. This isn’t going to correct the eHealth scandal. This is going to do nothing for the Green Energy Act.

This isn’t going to help these small businesses who looked at their tax bills and thought, “I remember hearing about a reduction in my taxes; how come that never happened?” It didn’t happen. They stayed where they were two budgets ago. They stayed where they were in the last budget.

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This isn’t going to do anything to control the expenses at the Pan Am. This isn’t going to help pay the 91 cents for parking and the \$1.89 for the Starbucks coffee. This is not going to do that. This is not going to help that. This is only going to hurt some businesses in an attempt to help others.

This is all wrong. This is backwards. This tinkers at the edges. There are serious issues that we have in Ontario, very serious issues. Companies across Canada are sitting on \$500 billion in cash in capital reserves they will not invest, and they will not invest it in Ontario. Why? Why won’t they do that? They don’t trust this government. They do not have any trust in a government that says, “I’m going to lower your taxes, but my fingers were crossed behind my back. I’m not going to lower your taxes.” They don’t trust a government who, when we saw great exploration in Ontario, up in the far north, when De Beers was producing the Victor Mine, and the government knocked on their door and said, “Oh by the way, we now have a diamond tax in Ontario.” De Beers said, “For heaven’s sake, in our business plan this was not the regime in Ontario.” There was no diamond tax in Ontario. They said, “Don’t worry. We’re only going to tax all the diamond companies.” There’s only the one.

Speaker, you look at the failing grade this government has on the Ring of Fire. It’s an obvious spot in Ontario for growth. We in Ontario can have unprecedented results by harnessing that Ring of Fire. I have had breakfast, lunch and/or dinner with all of the proponents up in the far North. You know what they say to me? What’s to stop this government from bringing in a chromite tax? That’s what is worrying them; that’s one of the many things that’s worrying them. They did it with the diamond tax. Who would have ever dreamt in a million years that you could open a diamond mine in Ontario and they’d snap their fingers and bring in a diamond tax. I’m telling you, this is the companies who are looking at exploration up there. This is those companies who are saying, “We don’t trust these guys. They’re going to bring in a chromite tax. Sure as the nose on your face, they’re going to bring in a chromite tax.”

Now let me tell you what else is ailing these companies. I had breakfast with one of the companies a short while ago—before the summer, actually—and said to them, “Now, last year, when I was up there you had 80 people working and you spent \$200 million on exploration.” That was to a lot of companies in North Bay. I’ve said this many times in the Legislature. When I first flew in there on my first trip ever, I saw the blue-and-white-striped tents, and a big smile came over my face because those tents are from my riding. That’s where they’re made. When I got a little closer and saw

that big mound of drill rods, I had an even bigger smile because we have 12 companies in my riding of Nipissing that make those—\$200 million they spent last year on exploration.

Do you know, I asked them, “How much are you spending this year? How many people are you hiring?” Zero. There’s nothing up there. They went from 80 to four people to mine the site. He said to me, “Why would we spend any more of our shareholders’ money delineating our ore body when we have no way to get the ore out?” This government has a failing grade. They have bungled that file, as well as many other files. They have bungled the most important file for northern Ontario, for our First Nations and for southern Ontario. Where do you think your ore and all your products are going to come from if you don’t go after this? They have bungled this.

Only the PC caucus has a real plan to put people back to work in Ontario, to restore economic growth and bring us back to our rightful place as the economic engine of Confederation.. Only we on this side have a plan to free businesses from the tax and regulatory burden that this government has placed upon them so they can invest and create the jobs Ontarians deserve.

This legislation won’t do it. We here in the PC Party, this side of the House, will do that for you. Thank you very much for enjoying my hour speech.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Catherine Fife: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That was quite an hour. I’d like to congratulate the member from Nipissing, although I would like to tell him that just because you call a white paper “bold” does not make it so.

But this bill in particular is moving in the right direction. This bill—and I’m going to speak to the bill. I know it’s a novel idea, but I’m going to speak to it—actually addresses the elimination of the loophole that allowed large companies to not pay the employee health tax on the first \$400,000 in payroll and also implements an increase in the exemption. Currently—just to get back on track—there is an exemption for paying the employee health tax on the first \$400,000 in an employer’s payroll. This applies to businesses with one employee or to large banks or large corporations. Some of those large corporations who got \$500,000—Maple Leafs Sports, actually, just this past week. I’m sure this will be the first time you’ve ever heard this, but the New Democrats agree with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation that that is corporate welfare. They do not need it, it did not make a big difference, and it is not helpful to small businesses.

Just to get back to what is actually beneficial to small businesses, though—and I’d just like to remind the chamber that the CFIB and the chamber and all small business groups support this change because they are looking for some relief. I think the member actually made some good points, though: It’s undetermined whether or not this would actually increase employees. Does this actually generate jobs?

Is it a progressive tax policy that at least is moving in the right direction? Yes. Will we be supporting it? Yes, because we choose to participate in this minority government and we choose to actually try to make a difference for small and medium-sized businesses, which have been largely left out of the equation for way too long.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Steven Del Duca: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I listened with great interest earlier to the member from Nipissing as he was providing us with his version of what has taken place over the last nine or 10 years here in the province of Ontario. What was interesting, as he was discussing at great length how the province hasn’t moved in the right direction—he was talking about lists as well, and he mentioned his riding.

I think it bears mentioning here in this House that over the last 10 years in North Bay, in the riding of Nipissing, the North Bay Regional Health Centre received a total increase in base funding of 131.5% since 2003.

In 2010, in that member’s riding, construction was completed on the North Bay Regional Health Centre. This government, because we believe passionately in investing in people and infrastructure, invested \$551 million in that particular hospital project.

Regarding wait times for health care, since 2004, North Bay General Hospital has received \$16 million to provide 27,000 additional procedures, reducing important wait times in the community of Nipissing. That means, for the people of that member’s community, cataract surgery being reduced by 354 days or 83%, outpatient CT scans by six days or 16%, and hip replacements are down by 250 days or 48%. Did I mention MRIs? Since our government took office in 2003, because we believe passionately, as I said, in investing in infrastructure, we have added one new MRI to North Bay General Hospital.

With respect to family health teams in his community, there are 14 new doctors and 18 new health care professionals providing care for over 20,000 new families.

This list goes on. What’s crucial in all of this is to remember that you can’t cut your way to prosperity. You can’t cut your way to building a stronger province. This Premier, this government, for 10 years have been investing in people, investing in infrastructure, and investing in supporting a dynamic and innovative business climate in communities like Vaughan and Nipissing. That’s why our province is headed in the right direction. Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further questions and comments?

Mr. John O’Toole: Yes, thank you very, very much, Mr. Speaker. I was privileged to sit here this afternoon and listen to Mr. Fedeli, the member from Nipissing, our opposition critic for finance. I want to commend him personally for the detailed research that he provided for all members of the House here today of how scandalous this current government is in terms of its accountability to really be trusted.

1710

Bill 105, as he explained—and he explained it very well. He said this is really just shifting the revenue, to someone else paying. The cost of it all is going to be shifted to some other business. They really don't get the whole argument that he was making with respect to the scandal on the energy file that he spoke rather passionately about, as well as the other taxes they've levied without any excuse or any explanation—and still in debt at every turn. By every measure, they're in debt: \$22,000 per person in Ontario. That's the debt load. Even Don Drummond said, in the review he did, that we have a structural deficit.

You look at these poorly executed plans—and there's an important quotation that I think is very appropriate here: "Vision without action is a dream, but action without vision is a nightmare." That's exactly what you've done to Ontario.

Quite honestly, there's some value in the Green Energy Act and others, but if you look at the execution of the plan itself—you can't pay someone 80 cents for a product like solar and then sell it for five cents.

Really, the business plan or the risk assessment that was not done shows that this is a government—if they thought the gas plant was a wise move, why did they deceive the people of Ontario by saying it cost \$40 million? That's part of what—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): I have to ask you to withdraw that unparliamentary remark.

Mr. John O'Toole: I withdraw that.

I suspect that they just didn't explain to the people of Ontario the real cost for a political decision, and we're going to find out tomorrow what that was.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): We have time for one last question or comment.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: The issue here is that while the initiative and the name of the bill is encouraging, addressing the fact that we need to look at working towards improving the conditions of small businesses, simply putting that in the title of the bill doesn't actually create the conditions.

While I acknowledge that this bill does what we've asked the government to do for a number of years, there's a significant loophole. The way we treat a small business, like a local law firm—a shout-out to my colleagues in the legal field—or the way we treat small businesses—

Mr. Jeff Yurek: Pharmacists.

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: —like pharmacists, like our friend from Elgin–Middlesex–London, restaurants or other small businesses and the way we treat multinational corporations must inherently be different. Their circumstances are different. Their conditions are different. Their economies of scale are quite different. The fact that this government doesn't have a strategic way of addressing that difference and treating small businesses in a way that would encourage them and support them and create a climate in our province that would allow them to flourish is a strong indication that this government is failing at addressing the real needs of small businesses in Ontario.

While it's important to acknowledge that increasing the threshold from \$400,000 to \$450,000 will benefit some small businesses, this is certainly not what small businesses want in Ontario as a fulsome way of addressing their concerns. We must do much more if we're serious about creating a climate in Ontario which protects and supports and encourages more growth in the small business sector, which is something we must do moving forward.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): That's it for the questions and comments. I return to the member from Nipissing for his reply.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you to the members from Kitchener–Waterloo and Bramalea–Gore–Malton. I'll be going across there in a moment. Your mother will be proud. You handled this one gingerly.

I have to say, it's not large corporations, Speaker—when they speak of large corporations, it includes family-owned businesses, like our locally owned Canadian Tire, like our locally owned independent grocer. That's who will be adversely affected by this.

To the member from Vaughan, thank you very much for your comments as well. The member from Vaughan has talked to me about how you can't cut your way to prosperity. He spent a lot of time talking about the North Bay hospital. I would ask, if you can't, then why would the North Bay hospital have recently fired more than 40 nurses? I would ask the question to the member for Vaughan over there. Also, he talked about the amount of MRIs that are given in North Bay. I would ask the member for Vaughan, how many MRIs are provided at the hospital in Vaughan? Oh, that's right; he hasn't brought up the hospital in Vaughan. That's correct.

Speaker, I say to you, this legislation is more proof that this government simply isn't capable of taking the decisive action that's needed to get our province turned around and headed in the right direction. When you look at this bill in the overall context of the direction of this government, it simply isn't close to going far enough. That's why we need change here at Queen's Park. That's why, over the last hour, I've talked about the things that they have done and done wrong—so very, very wrong—and the things that our party would do. I would encourage the people to go to ontariopc.com and look up our 14 white papers, and you'll understand what we mean by bold change for Ontario.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. Kevin Daniel Flynn: It's a pleasure to join the debate this afternoon. From the outset, let me say that I'll be sharing my time with the member from Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

We all come to this House from different backgrounds, and I think that's a good thing for the people of Ontario. As we pass legislation in this House or as we take a certain perspective on legislation in this House, I think the fact that we all come from different places is a good thing.

I happen to come from a small business background. I have worked in small business in my life, for sure, and found that the entrepreneurship route was the way that I wanted to go in my own personal career. I started a very small business and grew it into a fairly nice-sized business, and when I was elected to Queen's Park I decided that I was going to sell that business. It's great to see that that business is still operating and thriving in the town of Oakville and has created even further jobs.

I think that bringing a small business background to the table leads me to take a different approach when I talk to people in my own community of Oakville and when I'm talking to the chamber of commerce, for example, and as much as we like to celebrate when we get a big opening in our community, when we have something like a Ford investment—we just made a record investment in Ford that's going to ensure that the Ford plant in Oakville, in my community, guarantees about 3,000 jobs for the next decade. That's something that I think is really important in the auto economy, which is a fluctuating business globally.

Despite the gloomy outlook of the member from Nipissing, who just spoke, Ontario remains the number one jurisdiction when it comes to auto manufacturing in the entire North American continent. He seemed to dwell on a lot of the negative aspects, from his perspective, of what's happening in Ontario's economy, and at the end of the speech left me with the impression that he and his party will not be supporting the reforms that are being announced in Bill 105. I think that's a shame.

Certainly, from somebody who, as I said, came from a small business background, you start with an idea. You usually start with a very minimal investment of your own that you can scrape up and you go to the bank; sometimes you have to rely on the banks. Often, you go through periods of time, as you're developing and growing that industry, where the rent is getting paid and the suppliers are getting paid and the employees are getting paid, but there are days and weeks and often months where you, as the owner, are not getting paid. Still, the value of doing that is something that makes people persevere. The independence that comes along with small business is something that I think people really treasure.

What they don't want is for government to stand in the way. They want government to assist. They want government to be helpful. Bill 105—putting on my small business hat—tells me that this government at Queen's Park today is one that is interested in being helpful and one that understands that the backbone of our economy is small businesses. Job growth comes from small businesses. It's people who come up with an idea, decide to take that chance and go out into the marketplace and say, "Here's a product. Here's a new idea. Here's a new way of doing things. I'm going to see if I can make something happen with that."

The reforms that are taking place under Bill 105 would help more than 60,000 of those small businesses to promote themselves, to promote jobs and growth, to reinvest capital and to hire more employees. For about

12,000 of those businesses, it means that they wouldn't pay the employer health tax at all.

1720

I think that when you're starting a business in Ontario, like I did, you look to the province as a place that you want to not only start a small business—and you can start a small business anywhere in the world, Speaker. But I think you want to start a small business in a community that has some of the values that you have.

Some of those values that I find in the province of Ontario: I think there's a value of having a very strong public education system. I come from a very affluent community. We have a lot of people in Oakville who have done very, very well in their careers. They earn very high incomes. Any time my community is ranked up against others, as they do across the country, Oakville invariably comes in the top five. Sometimes it's first; sometimes it's third; sometimes it's fifth. But I'll tell you, when I go around my community, you would think Oakville would be a community that values strong private education. It's often seen as that being where the rich people go. It's entirely the opposite, Speaker.

When I go around my community, what people value is public education, because quite often it's their public education that has allowed them to be successful individuals, that has allowed them to pursue careers or to move ahead, often from moderate means. Often these people have started from families that were just scraping by. They have been able to get a public education. They have been able to get into university or skills training or into a college, and they have been able to make something of themselves.

So what they want to see is a competitive economy, they want to see competitive tax rates, and they want to see a business climate where people are able to come forward with ideas and know that they will pay their fair share and know that they will have to follow certain rules and regulations when it comes to health and safety and to other things that I think you would like to see applied to your own family. If you've got people who work for a small business, you'd like to know that your children, for example, are working in small businesses where it's safe, where there are health and safety inspections. You'd like to know that they are being paid fairly, that the minimum wage is something that there has been a discussion about and that has been established at a fair rate. So you'd like to live, I think, in a community that's inviting to business but has a regulatory framework that allows that society to exist in a way that is also good for that society and for people to live in.

I think this bill, Bill 105, is an incremental approach to what we've been trying to do when we took over, and that is, we've been trying to take our tax structure from one that, frankly, was uncompetitive, was one of the highest on the continent, was one of the highest, certainly, in the OECD. We've been able to make some changes now that have moved us from having one of the highest provincial general corporate income tax rates in the country to the third-lowest in the country now.

When we look at ourselves from an international perspective, our corporate income tax rate now is lower than the combined—in the States, it would be the federal/state corporate income tax rate. Ontario's rate is lower than any state in the union with our southern neighbours, and we know what they are going through now with the Tea Party movement and some of the thoughts that were alluded to by the previous speaker from Nipissing.

I just don't think that's the right way to go, Speaker. I think we can make a much better co-operative climate with the people who run our small businesses than is being described by the previous speaker.

The exemption, should this bill pass—and I understand, from what's being said, that the third party will be supporting this bill. I think that's a good thing, and I thank the third party for their support, because I think it is an act worth supporting. So the proposed bill should pass.

Despite the fact that the Conservatives are opposing this bill, I still think it's one that speaks to what needs to be done, not only today, but also in the future, because the exemption, should this proposed bill pass, will be indexed to inflation every five years. So a person starting a small business now will know that, as that business grows, if that business grows to a stable point where it's around the \$5-million payroll mark, and as time moves on, the business won't suddenly be thrust into a position where it's paying higher taxes—unless it booms to a point where it's paying more than \$5 million. So that's under \$5 million on the first \$450,000 of their payroll each and every year.

What that does is it's going to reduce the cost of hiring and it is going to bring down what I've heard talked about for the past 30 years in this House: the burden of what people like to call red tape. Sometimes I think that is quite justified, and sometimes I think that, frankly, the red tape is a red herring. I think you've got to be very selective as to what regulations you want to leave in place. There are good regulations, and there are regulations sometimes, I'll admit—and I think that all three parties in the past have been guilty of this—that are regulation for regulation's sake.

The previous speaker talked a little bit about the College of Trades, and I just wanted to end my remarks on that. The breadwinner in our family was my dad. My dad was a tradesperson. He was a steamfitter. He worked on all the nuclear plants in the province of Ontario—not all, but I think about three quarters of them, anyway. He was very proud of his profession, and he always thought that we should be attracting more people to those skilled trades. Often we devalue those skilled trades.

We as a government decided that the skilled trades, those professions, are as worthy of a college of their own, as worthy of self-regulation, as any other profession in this province. When you look at dentists, lawyers, teachers and nurses—you can go on and on—when I hear somebody say, “Well, those people can have it, but certainly an electrician couldn't have their own college.

They're not smart enough to run their own college,” or, “A plumber couldn't possibly tell you anything about plumbing; that's got to be done by government,” I take offence to that.

I think the College of Trades is one of the most progressive things this government has ever done. I think you'll see the work that has taken place so far on the apprenticeship ratios. Neither government—our government, nor the previous government, Speaker, of which you were a part—was able to move on those ratios. We were always being asked to. We were being asked by the industry sometimes, and we were being asked by the unions sometimes. These guys have moved. They have moved quickly and they have moved fairly. Some of the ratios have gone up and some of them have gone down, but like Bill 105, it's an act that is supportive of this economy. It's a progressive approach, and I would urge the Conservative Party to change its mind and support Bill 105.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank my friend from Oakville, Mr. Flynn, for sharing his time with me on Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act, 2013.

I would add, just to take up on his point about the College of Trades: The member who spoke from the opposition, the Conservative Party, referenced what's going on at the College of Trades as a tax increase. Of course, it is nothing of the sort. Every penny that is put onto the tradespeople goes into the college and stays in the college. None of that money comes into government. It's an incredibly important distinction, and I don't know why the member opposite would imply otherwise.

My colleague Mr. Flynn talked about starting his own business. Well, I grew up in a small family business, and I can tell you from that experience for nine years that it is absolutely in my DNA to do whatever I can to support small businesses in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, and I am very pleased when I see initiatives coming forward from our government here that do that very thing.

My parents, Jim and Doreen Mauro, built a small corner store in 1966 in Northwood, and that store was open 14 hours a day, 365 days a year, for nine years. I don't know how the hell they did it with four young kids, with the home built right onto the back of the store, but that experience framed all four of us as children, I can tell you very seriously. We know what it was to be a small business owner in this province and not have a pension plan, not have a paid holiday, not get a sick day. We understand it very clearly, and it's through that experience that I am pleased when I see initiatives like this come forward.

The member opposite spoke about this bill, and he did his level best to understate the significance of it. I think he did his level best to leave people that are following the debate with the impression that this is the only thing we've ever done when it comes to taxation and taxation reform. Well, I just made a few notes while I was listening to him speak, and let me just rhyme off for you

off the top of my head a few of the things that I could remember that we've done:

- a single sales tax, which that party used to be in favour of, and I would say is probably largely responsible for Ontario coming through the greatest recession since the Great Depression better than any other province in Canada and better than many other countries. One of the single biggest reasons, probably, that we've recovered 146% of the jobs lost in the recession may very well be the single sales tax. We did that;

- corporate income tax rates: my friend from Oakville talked about those;

- the marginal effective tax rate: he referenced those; and

- the small business tax rate, from 5.5% to 4.5% to 4%: an over 20% reduction in the small business tax rate. The member from Nipissing didn't talk about that.

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He didn't talk about the fact that we eliminated the capital tax completely on investment. It didn't matter if you were a small business owner in Ontario—when you invested, we taxed you on that, whether you made a profit or not. We've completely eliminated the capital tax on investment in business in Ontario. It's 100% gone.

Many people probably don't know that we lowered the personal income tax rate for them by 1% on the first \$37,000 that they earn. That's 1% on \$37,000. If you're a dual-income household and you're both making \$37,000 or more, that's \$740. By the time it flows through on your taxes, I don't know what you net, but it's a significant increase. That's another piece of our tax reform that the member opposite didn't talk about—or income splitting. I had a friend of mine stop me on the street two or three years ago, and he said, "Billy, I've got to thank you." I said, "What for?" He said, "Your income-splitting tax reform measure has just put X amount of money back in my pocket, and based upon that, I was able to have a nice little trip with my wife a couple of weeks ago." Nobody talks about that stuff anymore. We've brought so much significant tax reform in, it's remarkable.

There is one piece, Speaker, that I want to focus on a little bit, though, that we don't talk about much in this place at all. I talk about it every chance that I get, and that is what we in northern Ontario call the BET, business education tax. I want to thank NOACC in northwestern Ontario—the Northwestern Ontario Associated Chambers of Commerce—who first brought this issue forward, I think, in the late 1990s, when the official opposition was in government. When we formed government in 2003, they continued to press this issue. What's the significance of the BET? Well, when local school boards used to have taxation powers, you would have this hopscotch across the province of different BET rates in different jurisdictions—depending on what they had done when it came to their bargaining over the years. I can tell you, in northern Ontario, northwestern Ontario specifically, the BET rates were the highest in all of Ontario—the business education tax on businesses.

What makes this more interesting—and I couldn't help but think about it when the member opposite from the official opposition was speaking—is that when NOACC, the Northwestern Ontario Associated Chambers of Commerce, first started advocating on this issue in the late 1990s or early 2000s, the Minister of Northern Development and Mines at the time was the leader of the official opposition today, Mr. Hudak. They advocated to him on this particular issue, and nothing happened. The rates stayed the same. Businesses in northern Ontario were left with largely disproportionate business education tax rates.

In our budget of 2003 or 2004—I forgot exactly when we started it—we began a phase-down of the business education tax rates so that those businesses in northern Ontario could come down to the provincial average.

Somewhere around 2008, it stopped. Northern Ontario has been fully implemented. As a result of the recession, the rest of the province stopped. Northern Ontario has now been brought completely down to the provincial average. I'm a little fuzzy on the number, but it's somewhere in the order of magnitude of, \$20 million to \$40 million every year is now left in the pockets of businesses in northern Ontario as a result of that one tax reform, the business education tax reform—and I can't help but underline, after having to listen for an hour to some of the comments made by the member opposite, that that was an issue that they left hanging on the table and chose not to address.

He talked a fair bit about businesses and energy rates as well. I want to talk a little bit—I only have a couple of minutes left here. We worked very hard, as a northern Liberal caucus, on a program that's called the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate program, or NIER, as it may be known in northwestern Ontario. This program is very significant. The large industrials now in northern Ontario—we're talking about taxation. There are some of them, not all of them—it has been completely misrepresented in this Legislature for a very long time that our government had something to do with the collapse of forestry in northern Ontario or in all of Ontario. I've challenged people to a debate on that any time they want; I've never had a taker. They've tried to link what happened in forestry to rising energy rates. I still offer that challenge. I would be happy to debate anybody on that at any time—no takers.

But one of the things we did do to help forestry—and they were the canary in the coal mine, I would say, when the recession came in 2008. Because in northern Ontario, forestry first started to feel the effects around 2005, if not a little sooner, we brought in a program called NIERP, the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program. I think that by helping to maintain those larger, I would say, forestry companies that managed to come through the recession—and we always knew the ones that could survive the recession would likely be the bigger ones, and they would be better positioned to survive on a longer term going forward.

We strongly believe that the northern energy rebate program is one of the reasons why, in my community of Thunder Bay–Atikokan, Resolute is still there; why they've got 400 to 500 people still working for them; why they've just announced a \$50-million investment in Atikokan, a community in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan—a \$50-million greenfield for a new sawmill—and other investments going forward.

Speaker, there's a long list of pieces here. I only had nine or 10 minutes today to touch on some of them, but I want to thank you, Speaker, for the opportunity to address Bill 105, the Supporting Small Businesses Act.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. Bill Walker: It's a pleasure to bring comments to the members from Oakville and Thunder Bay–Atikokan, and to speak about Bill 105, the small business act.

What the people in Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound tell me every day that I'm on the street and out meeting with them is, they need things like less red tape, less administration; less reporting that does absolutely nothing to improve their business, to allow them to add more people on. What they're hearing is people are coming in every day, harassing them, asking for more, with nothing in return other than, "We need more paperwork," to really just get in their way and stop them being more innovative.

What we need is less focus on inspectors. Think of the skilled trades tax and those people out bullying, almost, small business owners, people like hairdressers, mechanics, plumbers, whose licence is their ability to earn their income for their family. What these folks come in and do is intimidate and threaten them that if they don't pay these added costs and these added taxes, they'll take their licence, which then negates their ability to make a living.

I give a prime example in rural Ontario of the abattoirs. What we saw under this government is them come in and add more regulation, more bureaucracy, more requests that, again, did nothing that actually helped that small business owner stay in business. In fact, it's proof that it has driven most of those small abattoirs right out of business. And anybody that's still in the business, the first thing they say to me is, "If I could sell this business tomorrow, it would be gone. And I'll never, ever encourage my kids"—that's disheartening in something that's so proud.

We need this government to stop tweaking around the edges, as they do with almost all the legislation. They're not looking at anything substantive; they're trying to tweak. We need them to stop the red tape and the bureaucracy and administration, the overburdening of red tape. If they want to support small business, what I would suggest is, try looking at actually lowering taxes, instead of bringing in new taxes. Reduce the red tape. Reduce the energy rates, which, again, have driven a lot of businesses out of our province to other places and abroad.

Speaker, they need to create a fair playing field and work with the chambers of commerce and federal independent business to create policies that will engage

and actually encourage people to expand the heartbeat of our economy: small business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'm happy to comment on the debate that we had for the members for Oakville and Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

This bill is something that the NDP talked about in the last budget session. Currently, right now—the Ontario employment health tax was a \$400,000 exemption for payroll, but it was for any business. You could have one employee, or a big national corporation like a bank. They could all write off the employment health tax.

We had suggested that that corporate tax loophole be closed for the bigger corporations, and we suggested that putting a payroll amount of \$5 million on there would continue to help the small business owners.

We're glad to see that the Liberals are actually implementing this bill to promote one of their promises that they made for closing corporate tax loopholes. I think this is a step in a direction that is going to help small business. That means that right now, for anybody who is a small business owner and has a \$5-million payroll, their first \$450,000 is going to be exempt for the employee health tax. It is going to make some difference to the small businesses.

But we can do better. We can do better for small business and give them better tools so that they can be more successful. We have to recognize that small business is different from multinational corporations, and they need different assistance in order to make sure they're successful. I think we've all heard that small business is the bread and butter of our communities, and they do stimulate our economy and they are the creators of jobs in our neighbourhoods.

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I find that this bill will be supportable, but I am interested to hear what the committee is going to have to say on some of the issues with respect to how it would affect small business at large.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Hon. Madeleine Meilleur: When I was listening to the member for Nipissing, I thought I was listening to the Republicans and the Tea Party down south—you know, to balance the budget, close the hospitals, fire nurses, eliminate full-day kindergarten, cut electricity rates to large business, and transfer the costs to all of you who are listening, if you are.

I was very disappointed, because—look at what's happening right now in the United States. I feel sorry for those who need the services. Of course, the billionaires over there don't need the services. They don't want the Obamacare, so that's why all of them are blocking the passage of the bill to pay their bills. It will help 44 million Americans; no, they don't want that. Because they have all that money, they can be passing those who are waiting for care, so they are jumping the queue. They like jumping the queue. They don't want anybody—44

million Americans. Think about it, all of you who are listening. Some 44 million of you—we don't have 44 million Canadians, but let's say just half of them would not have health care services. I was very sorry to hear that.

As you know, there is this party, the Conservative Party, which looks to the Republicans. I know that some of them go and help in the Republican elections. They want to bring that model here. We don't want that model, on this side of the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Questions and comments?

Mr. John O'Toole: I was here for some of the time that Thunder Bay–Atikokan spoke, and I'm convinced that he read the notes he was given, perfectly; I can assume that.

We're hearing now that most of the things that Bill 105—and you were replying to the member from Nipissing, when in fact you should have been replying to your own members—not to be kind of a lecturing type or mean-spirited.

Bill 105 has a laudable goal and objective, but you've got to look to the roots of where these things come from. This provision for an exemption was brought in by the Conservative government. We've been arguing for the last 10 years to ease the pressure on small business, and I think it was only through the work of our leader, Tim Hudak, that you've modestly moved forward on that attempt, so I will modestly give you some credit.

Here's the real issue: If you look at the bill—you've put in what I call the “poison pill” scenario. You've capped the amount that—your payroll can be at \$5 million, I believe the number is, which means a lot of the businesses don't qualify. The program is going to cost you a few dollars, but your revenue's not going to change because you're going to raise the tax from other businesses. That's what you're doing. You're shifting the barrier onto other businesses. That's what you're doing. If you don't get that, then you should do a little bit of research on your own bill.

I'm not specifically being critical of anyone, but when I listen to the remarks, it's quite clear that none of you have been properly briefed on the bill, because it doesn't do a thing. It shifts the tax burden to another group. The other group will now be paying more. This is the very problem, the root cause of Ontario's dilemma of having 300,000 families without an income.

I hope to have an opportunity in a few minutes to speak in more detail about the bill and the other part of the economy.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): One of the government members has two minutes to reply. The member for Thunder Bay–Atikokan.

Mr. Bill Mauro: I want to thank the members from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound, London–Fanshawe, Ottawa–Vanier and Durham for their comments.

The member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound talked about less red tape. The single biggest initiative, probably, that has occurred in Ontario's history was the

creation of the single sales tax. That initiative alone eliminated thousands of pages of work and documents that businesses had to do—

Mr. Bill Walker: Not enough.

Mr. Bill Mauro: Well, nobody said there's not always more work to do. The point is that it was always a good idea. The Conservatives thought it was a good idea until we introduced it, and then they opposed it. I think it took about 1,000 employees off the payroll overnight.

When you talk about lower taxes—I'm not sure what the member's history was, if he was a city councillor or not, but I was for six years in Thunder Bay. If you want to talk about lowering taxes, how can you be in this place and not remember what the official opposition did to every municipality in the province of Ontario when you undertook what was probably the biggest tax hike, tax shift, in the history of this province? You downloaded on to the residential property tax base the responsibility for services that were, up to that point in the history of this province, the responsibility of the provincial government.

That's what you did. You had a \$5-billion hole in good economic times. You sold a highway for \$3 billion that was valued at \$11 billion to make the \$5 billion only \$5 billion; it would have been \$8 billion. You gave all those costs—another \$3 billion.

I talk about it when I'm in my community, Riverview Drive or Edward Street in my riding of Thunder Bay–Atikokan. If you live in Westfort or the east end, when you get your residential property tax bill out, thank a Conservative. We've been uploading those costs, combined uploads of Ontario municipal property fund and the uploads from your downloads to try to make the residential property tax bills a little more saleable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Further debate?

Mr. John O'Toole: I don't want to debate the collapse because today, here, more has been said than done. Now, I do want to pick up with a fresh slate here and say that Bill 105 is a small start in the right direction, but it doesn't go nearly far enough in terms of making sure that we create jobs in the private sector. I always like to think of it this way. The member from Atikokan got off on the track there about the “who does what” and the election at least in 1995.

I was a councillor. In fact, I was chair of budget at the time. We came here under very similar circumstances as today, to be honest. Basically, back then, Bob Rae and Floyd Laughren—I met with them, along with other members—not just myself; there were quite a few people. Before the social contract—the NDP would remember this—they had a program put out by Ed Philip, who was the Minister of Municipal Affairs, that was called the expenditure reduction plan. That was the birth of the whole social contract. No one would agree with it because what they were doing was cutting the transfer payments. They were cutting the transfer payments at a time when municipalities were in the same dilemma they're in today—infrastructure and all the rest of it.

Liberals haven't fixed one bridge, really, to be quite honest about it. The one that the Premier had the picture taken at this weekend: She had to go into an arena—the bridge wasn't finished—to have the picture taken. I digress.

Here's the real issue. You've got to put things in perspective. Back then, under the left-wing government of Bob Rae, now a Liberal—but they're the same, really.

Mr. Robert Bailey: Same thing in a hurry.

Mr. John O'Toole: Just a Liberal in a hurry, is all it is. But the budget was \$48 billion, and the deficit was \$12 billion. The big thing that was killing them: The debt interest, the interest on the accumulated debt, was becoming the largest expenditure.

Where are we today, to bring this into Bill 105? Today, in Ontario, our budget is about \$120 billion. You have to ask yourself, "They've increased spending by about 60%. Is it any better?" No. They've got in a deeper hole than the NDP had.

Here's the issue: The expenditures in the province of Ontario, for the most part—about 50% of every dollar is wages somewhere in the system, okay? I didn't say that was bad. But you've got to realize that the structural component of your budget, if you're expanding the wage provisions faster than the growth of the economy, you're eventually in trouble.

Don Drummond said it right in this report that they have a structural deficit. This is the commission on reforming Ontario's public service, by Don Drummond—mandatory reading. In fact, there are 360 recommendations here. I'd encourage the people of Ontario: Don't let Charles Sousa, the Minister of Finance, or anyone else pull the wool over your eyes. We're seriously in the ditch.

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Here's the issue: Of the budget, the first and most important expenditure—we'd all agree with this—is health care. It's expanding faster than anything else, and in that there are subdivisions. The growth in the cost of drugs is 15% a year—not sustainable. No one wants to be cruel about it, but I have constituents who have applications in under the EAP, the Exceptional Access Program, dying of lung disease, dying of other diseases, they're going blind, and they can't get the drugs in Ontario today.

In fact, there was an article in the paper last week about how you now have to have a fundraiser to get the medication. It was in the media. One of the authors from the Toronto Star—I wish I had it with me. I have it in the office. I think it's a scandalous comment on the perilous state of health care in Ontario, which people agree with. They are cutting test strips for diabetics. They're limiting the number you can get now. They're cutting physiotherapy. The member today, our finance critic—

Ms. Soo Wong: Tell the truth.

Mr. John O'Toole: Pardon? Somebody over there said, "Tell the truth." I am telling the truth. Who was that? Stand up and speak. Set yourself free. You're a former nurse and you know the perilous state. Mr. Fedeli told us today, through the Speaker, now, that they laid off

40 nurses, and your critic got up and said how much money they've invested. The problem is that you have no plan.

One would wonder where to start here, but I'm going to complete. Health care is the number one expenditure. Number two is education. We agree with most of this. We know there's a lot of waste—Ornge helicopter, eHealth. I don't need to go on.

Mr. Jim McDonell: Too much waste.

Mr. John O'Toole: A lot of waste. The third is servicing interest on the debt. Let's put that into context. Interest is about \$10.5 billion. I just say that so easily—\$10.5 billion on interest, on the mortgage.

In today's economy in Canada and Ontario, the only reason the economy is functioning at all is because of low interest. When interest is so low and the debt is costing us almost \$11 billion, imagine if the interest goes up, and it will, because what they call quantitative easing is putting more money in. Without growth in the economy, they're putting more in, which is eventually inflation.

Here's the real issue: On this whole discussion where quantitative easing comes into this, if it goes up 1%—this is an important number. If interest goes up 1%, it will cost \$800 million in interest.

Mr. Jim McDonell: What is that again?

Mr. John O'Toole: One per cent of interest will cost \$800 million more. You won't get anything for it. Some bondholder in Europe or somewhere else in the world will probably get that \$800 million and buy another one of our gas plants or something like that. It's a disaster.

I said this earlier and I thought after about how appropriate on Bill 105 it was: Vision without some action is a dream. It's like, "I'm going to play NHL hockey." Well, you better work hard and practice and all these things. Vision with no action is a dream.

Action with no vision is a nightmare, and that's exactly what we have in Ontario. The Green Energy Act sounds very good. Who would disagree with it? But then when you drill down on it, right now we're paying people 80 cents even when we don't need the power from wind at night and we're getting, at night, about three cents. We're paying them about 15 to 20 cents for wind.

Besides that, we're having to turn off nuclear plants. The cost of all this supporting the dispatching of the Green Energy Act, renewable materials under FIT contracts, is about a billion dollars this year. You don't get anything for it. It's paying people to not produce.

What does that mean to the economy? Here's another example of a number: One point in the GDP—I think some of the newer members might find this important, including the Minister of Finance—with each point in the GDP that goes up, you get \$700 million in revenue. So if your gross domestic product, which is the value of your goods and services, goes up, your revenue goes up automatically, like boats in a harbour, by \$700 million. If it goes down, it's even worse: You lose the \$700 million, and it costs you \$500 million because you have to retrain,

relocate, sever and get rid of all of these people who were doing certain things.

In Ontario, where are we? Well, a good barometer is this: There are about 346,000 people without jobs. That's probably 300,000 families without income.

Interjection.

Mr. John O'Toole: I wish I had a full hour here. Vic got an hour. Why can't I have an hour? Anyway, I'll just go on with that.

I thought the member from Nipissing did a marvelous job. He gave a couple of really good examples. I commend him, because he has worked hard, not just on the energy file, but he's right up to date on the finance file. He talked about visiting California and a small community: Vallejo, population 116,000. A massive city infrastructure building—he walked in the front door, and there was nobody there but the manager and one other person. There was nobody working, and their budget was considerable. Now they're bankrupt. Why are they bankrupt? Because they were spending faster than the revenue was coming in. That's called a structural deficit, and we have one in Ontario. Don Drummond said it in the book, the one I said, the bible—

Interjection: Show them the book.

Mr. John O'Toole: —this one here. This fits nicely into our plan. The 14 white papers that we have address, almost, the 360 recommendations. Pretty well every one of them is addressed by our action plan. If people want to look it up online, it's called Paths to Prosperity. I would encourage you to look at them, question them, call your member.

What our leader, Tim Hudak, said was this: He invited the Premier of Ontario to examine the papers and take some of it, do something. Doing nothing is not going to move Ontario forward and make a better future for everyone.

In fact, I think the Premier is in paralysis now, just terrified. Every time she goes, she's handing out money, and she's probably saying, "Where am I going to get it?" I'm sure she's tearful at the end of each day, saying, "How am I going to pay off this credit card?" It will all come to roost about next March, when they try to bring in a budget.

I was at an event the other night—my closing remarks here, but I still have the floor, I hope. I was at an event with some people I have a great deal of respect for. They are people who are involved in organizations, and these organizations are giving advice under the prosperity group. They are members of that group. They are professors over at the university. One of them said—and I'm not making this up. I would not reveal their name. Vic didn't reveal the name of the barber either. Well, I'm not revealing the name here. They said that the Premier cannot bring in a budget because the revenue is even worse than they had forecast in their business model in the budget. What they're going to do is, they will bring in this hypothetical discussion about raising \$50 billion for transit tax tools—who are they talking about?—and then they're going to call an election, because if they bring in a budget, people will see through the whole charade that has been going on here.

Interjections.

Mr. John O'Toole: Don't believe me. There have been reports by the Auditor General of Ontario. This report here, prior to the election, said you're in trouble, and you still are. This report analyzed Dwight Duncan. You're in trouble. This report is on the Mississauga gas plant. Tomorrow we get the one on—this is Oakville. Oakville is tomorrow.

There's what you did to the horse racing industry: 60,000 people who are very hard to employ, out of work. That's action without a vision. It's tragic. I can't for one moment believe it.

Mr. Speaker, would you give me the indulgence of calling this bill tomorrow? I'll finish off the hour that's left.

With that, it has been a privilege to have a—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): Thank you very much.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ted Arnott): It being 6 of the clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 9 a.m.

The House adjourned at 1759.

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Thompson, Lisa M. (PC)	Huron–Bruce	
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sur les services aux personnes ayant une déficience
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Chair / Président: Vacant

Committee Clerk / Greffier: Trevor Day

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